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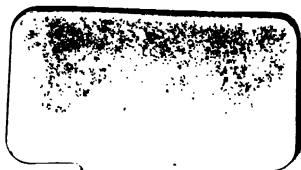
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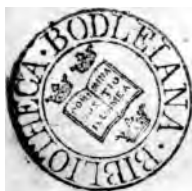


HENCE THESE TEARS.

A Novel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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ERRATA.

VOL. I.

- Page 29, line 6, *for* "Barossa," *read* "Barrosa," and *passim*.
" 117, " 9, *for* "mavish," *read* "mavis."
" 118, " 5, *for* "Chief Lord Commissioner," *read* "First Commissioner."
" 127, " 13, *insert* "you" *after* say."
" 190, " 13, *for* "laid," *read* "lay."
" 191, " 11, *for* "verticle," *read* "vertical."
" 191, " 12, *for* "identically," *read* "similarly."
" 256, " 8, *for* "council," *read* "counsel."

VOL. II.

- " 23, " 25, *for* "drastic," *read* "searching."
" 29, " 12, *for* "impatiently," *read* "impatient."
" 35, " 13, *for* "the next," *read* "at noon."
" 48, " 11, *after* "troubled," *insert* "yourself."
" 53, " 3, *dele* "up."
" 55, " 17, *for* "untampered," *read* "inviolable."
" 251, " 8, *after* "above," *insert* "for anything."
" 286, " 14, *for* "Caroline," *read* "Harriet."

VOL. III.

- " 4, " 17, *for* "lion," *read* "griffin."
" 39, " 7, *for* "fifty," *read* "nearly seventy."
" 48, " 18, *for* "collide," *read* "clash."
" 57, " 25, *for* "wrong," *read* "wrongly."
" 82, " 2, *for* "should," *read* "would."
" 103, " 22, *for* "give in," *read* admit."
" 108, " 22, *for* "workmanlike" *read* "prosaic."



HENCE THESE TEARS.



CHAPTER I.

GARWOOD PRIORY.



A PRELUDE.



MAGNIFICENT lines of elms in their richest summer verdure, slopes of mossy sward with fallow-deer grazing. Beech avenues spreading in infinite tracery of branch, and rising from enormous boles. Broad splashes of sunlight striking the brown bare ground beneath them. Squirrels running ; rabbits sitting up to listen ; wood-pigeons battering out among the leaves ; ouzels melodious overhead. Out beyond, where the park wall ceases, a rich plateau of pasture lands, where

the solemn meditative kine seem to browse for ever in their herds; then field rises after field, and hedge-row is traced behind hedge-row, until, in the extreme distance, a pile of red-sandstone crag pushes up bold and velvety against the massed clouds, while beneath flashes Bevern, folding and winding its thin silver coils away through the deep Cropshire meadows.

Garwood Priory itself is a grey-faced block with mullioned windows and a central clock tower. Various Esdailes had repaired and added, after their own devices, to the pile. The tastes of their diverse periods marked the building in patches here and there. Next to nothing remained of the actual religious edifice, out of which the cowled heads were driven at the Reformation. Then King Harry granted their precinct and broad lands to one Sylvester Esdaile, whose portrait in a red bush beard and heavy metal collar, by Zuccherò, remained to this day in the more modern priory's entrance hall. These Esdailes had managed to keep grip and hold on the soil of the outcast Cistercians

ever since. The men were tall, large-limbed, good-natured, and not over-bright mortals. The daughters of the race, golden-ringleted, blue-eyed, animated, intelligent. At least, so Vandyke, Lely, Dobson, and Reynolds, seemed to agree on canvas in transmitting them. Behind the priory, the park scenery became more broken, and undulating. Patches of bracken came in here; knolls of sand, honey-combed by rabbits and crowned by Scotch firs, rose in little eminences one behind another. Lovely as the park was, it had one defect, there was no piece of ornamental water. Still, to watch here on any summer day, the deep ravines fringed with hawthorn blossom, the dog-rose blazing in the tangled wood-wildernesses, the bent grasses out in soft and evanescent bloom, made one forget the want of a mere, with its tall melancholy beds of sighing reeds.

One dewy dawn, in the year of grace 1840, the date of this our history's prelude portion, two old broken-down labourers are trimming the roadside of the Priory

approach on this particular morning. They are notably past any work but the lightest—gray, bent, lean old hinds, with the rather weary, rather crafty look of the aged Cropshire peasant.

They rest on their hoes, and pull their forelocks deferentially, as a horseman, from the house, rides by them. A young man of twenty-one, six feet high, light-haired, gray-eyed, and regular-featured. A fresh, ruddy, Anglo-Saxon country gentleman of the best type. A notably handsome man, with a face that a child would run up to for protection; yet, withal, a countenance, how shall we say it? just a little heavy and stupid in the utter regularity of its comeliness. This is Harvey Esdaile, the present owner of the Priory.

His serfs and vassals, Adam Hodge and Peter Cox, drew long breaths when the squire had passed; as the Roman peasant breathes again, when the holy father has gone by. They did not, for the moment, resume their occupation of weeding the roads to the precinct of their liege lord.

“Our squire comes of age in a week,”

spoke Hodge, clearing his throat. "He has a main pleasant life before him; that he has—surely, Peter."

"Ay, ay," agreed Cox, moistening his palm for a fresh grip on the hoe, "only to sport and enjoy hisself."

"Can aught spoil life to a rich man?" propounded Adam, with an envious twinkle under his gray eyebrows.

"Why, Adam," exclaimed his comrade, "how you talk! One might think you was quite—what's the word?—an officer."

"What's that?" snarled Adam, bending to his work, with a slow rheumatic inclination of his spine.

"Them as knows the reasons of things, and contradicts others, and lays the law down."

"Parliament chaps?" hazarded Adam, with his head on one side.

"No," persisted Peter, doggedly, "I'm well nigh sure it's a full officer of some kind."

"I'll tell you," reverted Adam, with a raven-croak, "how this squire of our'n, young, rich, handsome, may have his life made no better than your'n."

"Well," muttered Peter, not greatly interested.

"Three things may come," croaked Adam, gleefully ominous, "ill-health the first."

"Oo's as sound as a bell;" said the other, expectorating in mild protest.

"A law-suit, the next;" from Adam, in malicious *crescendo*.

"Who is to law him?—his brother is always afloat," doubted Peter, ruffling his head.

"Last, a woman! She may come and spoil all for him," concluded Adam, smacking his lips in comfortable anticipation of such a lady's arrival.

"You have spoken gospel-truth, Adam," concluded Peter, much impressed by the sententious and weird utterances of his fellow-drudge. And, with a view of hastening the wheels of the Garwood Pandora's chariot, the two old clowns bent down, and went on assiduously weeding Mr. Esdaile's roads.

This is meant for a prelude; now let the narrative begin.



CHAPTER II.

BETWEEN THE LIGHTS.

FROM the deer and bracken of Garwood Priory to the river-scents and road-roar of Buckingham Street, Strand, is a pretty considerable leap, yet we must request our candid reader to bridge over, in imagination, this interval of space. The overture is over, the foot-lights are down, the little bell rings, the curtain goes up slowly. Scene, a money-lender's office in London. Time, about dusk. Persons, a man and a maiden love-making. Or rather, he love-making, she love-listening. His name Lucas Raymond, hers Harriet Behrends. He was the money-lender's clerk, she was

the money-lender's niece. He was in love, she did not reciprocate the sentiment. He wore a bad coat, she was a bar-maid. The brass-plate, outside the door of the house in which they sat, read imposingly enough, "The Battersea Fields Discount and Reversion Company." All this verbal flourish meant one lean old man and his clerk. Thus it was very impressive, and few of the public were the wiser.

The maiden's lips move first, and she changes her position impatiently.

"I will not wait for my uncle, if you pester me, Lucas."

She is pretty, dark, petulant, with tresses of ebony and features like a Jewess, a brunette, high-coloured, and rather overdressed. Not that her toilet is at all expensive, quite the contrary; but the rainbow has lent, simultaneously, too many of its hues to various portions of her attire, for the general effect to be otherwise than glaring. Nor is this excess of colour mended by some suspicious-looking gold trinkets which she wore, and one or two mock coral ornaments which did not improve matters.

"Then let us abandon sentiment and revert to the dry-as-dust topic of your uncle," agreed Lucas Raymond, with a shrug of resignation. "May I not even hold your hand?"

The young lady replied by placing the hand in question inside her muff, and pouted impatiently.

"Mr. Michaelson, my uncle, keeps late hours. Is this usual?"

"When," explained the clerk, stealing a sly glance at the girl, "my master and your relative sees a chance of squeezing out a pound more, he is not particular to a quarter of an hour or so."

Harriet Behrends laughed, and rubbed a mud-speck from her jacket.

"It is a dreadful trade. How his customers must hate him."

"He rather enjoys that, I believe," hazarded Lucas, biting a pen, and watching her behind his lifted hand.

"You will speak up for me when he returns?" begged the girl, with a change of manner, laying her hand on Raymond's arm.

"What am I to say?" asked the clerk, after another futile attempt to capture her fingers. "You certainly expect me to assume your cudgels on very lean encouragement."

"Now don't be ungenerous, Lucas," entreated Harriet, biting her under lip. "I only ask you to persuade my uncle in a business-like way (which I cannot), that such help as he renders his invalid sister, my poor mother, is wholly inadequate to her needs, and quite unworthy of his own affluence."

"You draw her quarterly pittance to-day, I suppose;" observed Lucas, stealing an inch or two nearer.

"What are twelve shillings a week!" with a toss of her curls.

"He doesn't spend more on himself," reflected Lucas, crossing his legs; "I will do him that justice."

"Is he ve-e-ery rich?" from Harriet, rounding her mouth in the enquiry, and widening her eyes.

"Whisper," said Lucas, drawing her ear to his mouth. "You won't tell?"

"N-no," said Harriet, breathless with expectation; "but don't tickle my ear; and don't dawdle in the telling."

Lucas murmured, in a mysterious voice, these words—

"Flour-bags full of sovereigns in all his cellars, and his own lower mattress stuffed with bank-notes."

"You goose," exclaimed Harriet, defeated. "Be off, I am very angry!"

"The last time," recurred Lucas, meditatively stroking his chin, "that I jogged Michaelson's memory in your behalf, he cast it in my teeth, that, as a barmaid at the 'Crown and Sceptre,' you were rather overpaid than otherwise."

"That was mean, for although the wages are well enough," allowed Harriet, drawing her finger up and down the office-table, "yet so much of my salary has to go in dress. I should be discharged at once, if I did not manage somehow to be always showy, and imperturbably neat. It is indispensable, that a barmaid should be spruced up and smart, day and night, wet or dry. A dowdy girl would not attract

nearly the same custom. The traffic in liquor on the premises would fall away."

"A curious fact," thought Lucas with a sarcastic smile.

"I allow my mother all I can," repeated Harriet, picking the feathers out of her grebe muff; "and added to her claims, now and then, my father's brother, a locksmith, whose forte is not sobriety, teazes a shilling or so from my scanty remnants."

"You are a good girl, Harriet," said Lucas, changing to serious encomium. "Come, sweetheart, give me the right to carry one end of the basket of your troubles."

"You are beginning it again, then?" rebuked Harriet. "A nice illustration, forsooth!"

"The old lady," he went on, "shall have a crib, as long as we have a roof over us. The locksmith shall have a plate as long as we can buy a dinner."

"No, Lucas; once for all, I cannot!" This time more kindly.

"Do you dislike me personally?"

"I don't know—I don't think I do—and yet——"

"Do you like somebody else better?"

"I like no one at all, yet. There!"

"Marriage will bring that."

"No, Lucas, I cannot marry you."

"Because I am poor?"

"Yes, partly, I believe, and mostly, now I reflect—I do not wish to show myself better than I am—You see, I am a mercenary girl, Lucas; not worth fretting or minding about."

"But a richer husband may not come."

"I must risk that."

"And your actual motive is——"

"That I have known the sting of poverty, and very terrible in its most hideous phases it is. With illness, more unbearable still. My only hope lies in a rich marriage; and, if this was my last word, I dare not face a poor one. Weak I may be, but at least you have the truth."

"You like me a little, then?" from Lucas, drawing a long breath.

"Well—I believe so. I certainly trust

you, if that be anything ;" and she ended in a smile, thoughtfully.

"I begin to see I shall not turn you, Harriet."

"How dark it grows," she shivered ; "I hate this owl's-light—this neither night nor day-time. Will my uncle ever return?"

"It is 'between the lights,' and I hang between happiness and misery—between yes and no."

"Indeed, Lucas, it must be No. I am cowardly and fainthearted, maybe, but No it must remain."

"Unalterably and irrevocably No?"

"The 'noest' No that lips can utter!"

"I hear your uncle coming in," he struck in with a groan. "If you give me a spark of hope, I will wait for you outside; if none, I will go home at once, when he enters, time is up long since. It is no use my turning on the rack, if my tormentor is obdurate."

"Quite, quite needless, Lucas!"

"For the last time, then, Harriet, must I go away?"

"You must!" between a sigh and a sob.



And Lucas went away 'between the lights,' finally rejected by Harriet Behrends, as Samuel Michaelson her rich money-lending uncle came in from the oppression of his necessitous fellow-men.





CHAPTER III:

ANOTHER REFUSAL.

SINCE our first introductory glimpse of the Squire of Garwood, on the gravel of his own approach, Harvey Esdaile has come of age in the correct manner for a Cropshire magnate to enter upon the responsibilities of life. He has roasted the necessary oxen ; he has made the necessary speeches. The feasting is done, and the tenantry have again resumed their normal sobriety. The Squire has once more ridden down his approach, taken coach to London, and eventually stood in Julius Bellamy's drawing-room and in Julius Bellamy's presence.

Now Mr. Bellamy resided at 16, Ara-

bian Crescent, Bayswater. An opulent city merchant was Julius Bellamy, a director of the Bank of England, a good name in Mincing Lane. It was really a crescent where Bellamy lived ; that is to say, there was not a straight room in the long, curving block of edifices. More than this, it was a crescent built with classical aspirations ; for four of the muses stood life-size in cement on the last house-roof to the right, and four more of these deities adorned in a similar position the last mansion to the left. What became of the missing muse, no man knows. Julius Bellamy was not classical, so he did not trouble himself much about the fate of the missing lady.

Let us return to the interior of number sixteen.

The merchant was watching with a look of unmistakable approval the fine handsome young fellow, who was addressing him.

There was a blush of graceful and ingenuous confusion on the young squire's face, which became him well as he told his tale. Julius Bellamy was mentally contrasting the well-bred modesty of his visitor

with the spurious polish and brazen effrontery of a certain nephew of his own.

"Well," was the merchant's mental comment, "has that unlucky girl of mine eyes in her head, or has she none? Will she never tell a gentleman from a billiard-marker?"

"To cut a long story short, Mr. Bellamy," said the squire, "I love your daughter Julia, and I am here to tell you so."

Julius Bellamy confessed that he was in a measure prepared for this announcement.

"I thought it," pursued Esdaile, smoothing his hat, "more fair and above-board to talk to you in the first instance, as Miss Bellamy's father——"

"You are a good fellow, Esdaile," said the merchant warmly. "I wish there were more like you."

"In case," suggested the other, with growing hesitation, "supposing you did not like my coming here after this avowal, you might tell me so frankly; and Miss Bellamy might be spared all future annoyance."

"My dear fellow!" exclaimed the father,

really moved, "you have my best—my warmest wishes ; but——"

"I can bear the truth, Mr. Bellamy," interposed Esdaile, with a glow on his face ; "it is kindest not to palliate matters. That 'but' of yours would have ushered in some obstacle to my hopes. Do not break your sentence at its most vital point to me."

"You had better see my daughter herself," said Mr. Bellamy abruptly, and with evident constraint.

The merchant had paused at the beginning of this sentence, as a man who hardly knew his own mind, or what course to suggest ; but he hurried out its conclusion suddenly and with a jerk.

"Stay !" exclaimed the squire, in an excess of generous diffidence, "if you estimate my chance with your daughter as poorly as your hesitation seems to express, I cannot distress Miss Julia by obliging her point-blank to refuse me."

"No, no, Esdaile," encouraged Bellamy, with a hand on the squire's shoulder ; "you

rate yourself too low. You may succeed ; but, frankly, you are too good, too chivalrous, to be exposed to the risk of a rejection at the caprice of a headstrong girl."

"I will hear my sentence without a murmur," responded Esdaile, in a pausing earnest voice ; "I shall never reproach Miss Bellamy, though her verdict be given against me. She has, probably, numerous admirers. I am only one, where many are, doubtless, both anxious and worthy."

"Look here, Esdaile," reasoned Julius with an effort ; "Heaven knows I wish you success ; but it would be hardly fair on the girl for me to hint even, why I am just now rather dubious of your attaining it. Take my advice ; I guess Julia's present frame of mind. Don't stake your whole future now on one rash word from an impetuous girl's lips. Hear what I counsel : leave the girl to me for a month. Don't approach her in the interval. Silence and time will, believe me, both fight your battle well with Julia. I ought to say no more."

"Nor need you, my dear Mr. Bellamy," cried Esdaile, with sudden fervour ; "your

generous confidence has moved me too much already. But on one point I must ask you to allow me to be firm. I must hear my doom from your daughter's lips this very morning."

There was a quiet sternness and unobtrusive resolution in this blushing, modest suitor, which convinced the merchant that further opposition on this head would be thrown away.

"Then you shall see her," agreed Mr. Bellamy, with a deep-drawn sigh and evident reluctance.

"Suspense would not be generous to Miss Bellamy," added Esdaile, in an explanatory murmur.

"But reflection would be extremely wholesome to that young lady," muttered her father, with an impatient frown. "A month might bring back her senses."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I merely said, Esdaile, that you rush upon your doom."

"So be it, Mr. Bellamy."

"Then Heaven help you both, for I can't," said the merchant; and, turning

away, he brushed his eyes with his sleeve, and rang the bell.

“Request Miss Julia to step down” (to the servant).

A pause and a silence. The two men stood on the hearth-rug, blankly regarding each other with their hearts beating fast in their ears.

A rustle, a light hand-touch on the door, and Julia Bellamy came in. She resembled the Chocolate-girl in the Dresden Gallery.

She looked very pretty, beyond question; and when she stood for a moment beside Esdaile, with her hand in his, the father's eyes were glazed and dim.

“Julia,” spoke Mr. Bellamy, with a strange sense of awkwardness upon him, “Harvey Esdaile here wishes to see you, and alone. Be pleased to bear in mind, my child, that all he is about to say has received my fullest sanction.”

Julia's lips could only form a terrified little “yes.”

The merchant gravely kissed his daughter's forehead, and withdrew, closing the door quietly after him.

Julia, strange to say, revived when her father was gone. She liked Esdaile; and he was one of those men whom women know instinctively that they can always trust, and need never be afraid of. The occasion was certainly distressing, but then she told herself that Harvey was so good and noble, that she knew he would let her off very kindly. What a pity it was, that he had come to ask her at all; she liked seeing him in the Crescent; and now all this would have to end. She would make at least one weak attempt to stave off the coming explanation.

"Miss Bellamy—Julia!" began the lover, changing colour every instant.

"Oh, please don't say anything," pleaded Julia, with a frightened, imploring look; "do be kind and good, as you are always, and go away and say no more about it."

Rather an inconsequent speech, truly; but meant in kindness all the same, and perfectly understood by the young man to whom it was addressed.

But Harvey could not spare her now. His rejection was certain, but she must speak it all the same.

"But, Julia, this is the question on which my whole life rests," pursued Esdaile, with a steady glance at the fluttering bosom and the tearful eyes.

"I am so very—very sorry," sobbed Julia, retreating behind a feminine rampart of tears. "Papa will be so vexed, and we shall never be the same friends again with you, Mr. Esdaile; and everything will be so uncomfortable and awkward, and indeed—indeed, I like you so very much."

"My dear Miss Bellamy," said Esdaile, relenting at the sight of her distress, "I am answered. You have said sufficient."

The wound had gone deep enough; but he uttered no wild word, and relieved his anguish in no reproaches. He realised his misfortune to the full. He foresaw that his own life henceforward was a hideous waste. The "No" of this sobbing girl had done it all. What dust and ashes, health, youth, ten thousand a year, and Garwood Priory, appeared to him now!

"In a word, Miss Bellamy, you cannot love me," he repeated, inclining his head with a kind of groan.

"I cannot marry you," she returned, in a whisper painfully tremulous with emotion. "I can never—never do so!"

"And time will bring no change?" he repeated, after an ominous pause.

"Time cannot cancel a promise given!" And here she suddenly flushed, and bent her eyes upon the ground. "Only death can do that, Mr. Esdaile."

"I will press you no further," he murmured, raising her hand to his lips; "may you be very happy. I am convinced your choice is worthier of you, in every respect, than I should have been. Farewell, and all prosperity attend you, Miss Bellamy."

"Oh, ten times no!" she faltered vehemently. "But then I knew somebody else first, and I—I became engaged to him. Had I seen you first, it might—have been otherwise!"

"It is well," said Esdaile calmly. "Forgive me for having pained you needlessly by the intrusion of my suit."

"Oh, Mr. Esdaile, if I could do anything to make you look less dreadfully unhappy!"

"You can give me one promise, Miss Bellamy;"—and he said it with a noble and generous earnestness—"you may, God knows, in your after-life, want a friend. We all need help at some time, in some ways; few of us are perfectly happy, none of us are safe from calamity. If, then, an hour of need, ten years, twenty years, hence, should arrive to you, remember there is one person in the world, who says now, as he will say years hence—we quiet men change little, Miss Bellamy—that, to perform for you the slightest service, would be to him the most inestimable blessing, in an existence that may be, to some extent, a lonely one. You will surely be rich; but——"

"Oh, no," she wept it out piteously; "poor—very poor indeed. Somebody else has very little money, and, alas! a good many debts."

"Julia!" he exclaimed, grasping her wrist with a countenance absolutely radiant, "show me that you are sorry for me by allowing me to help—I mean secretly and unknown to him—this man, who will one day call you his own. I have a rich in-

heritance. I say it bitterly now, and contemptuously enough. What are these riches without you?—dross and miserable dust! Let me discharge your lover's liabilities. I see now why your father is distressed. Let me raise this man whom you love in your father's eyes, in his own eyes, may be. You know not the temptations that beset needy men, however noble. Surely, when you know that this wealth is now as useless to me as to a dead man, it will be the falsest of false pride, if you refuse to let me help your lover into prosperity. I shall miss the means so very little. There are a hundred ways of aiding his career, which he need never know about. Does he want an office? money will gain that for him readily enough. Will he go into trade? I can advance him capital. You hesitate, Julia; now, really this is unkind——"

"Oh, Mr. Esdaile, how good and noble you are!" ejaculated Julia, with heaving bosom; "but your money we cannot, must not accept. The mere idea would drive my poor intended husband mad. He is so high-spirited, so sensitively honourable, on

these points. For myself, I promise, that, if trouble comes upon me in which you can aid, I will, next after my husband, look to you ; but I should wrong him to say, that, while he moves and breathes, I shall never want for kindness and protection."

"I am sure of that," agreed Esdaile, in hearty emphasis ; "I need no more to convince and assure me of this, than the fact that you have chosen him."

"You are not going ?" expostulated Julia, as Esdaile rose, and she said the words in a tone of ineffable pity.

"Indeed I am," said Esdaile, rising and pressing her hand ; "I am going, and have only a common-place 'good-bye' to give you."

The conclusion of the sentence appeared to choke Harvey Esdaile.

"For how long, Mr. Esdaile ?" demanded Julia musingly, and with renewed distress of feature.

"For a long time," he returned, with a weary sigh ; "until you send for me, in fact, and say that I can help you."

"Ah ! but that may be years ; long, illimitable years !" she added.

"Please God, for your sake, it may be never."

And he left her very quietly with this word.

But Julius waylaid his guest in the hall, and, rushing eagerly up to Harvey Esdaile, laid a hand of enquiry on each of his shoulders.

"It is as I feared, my poor boy," he surmised with a piteous groan, when he had perused the squire's face.

"I cannot complain," said Esdaile, fighting off his own emotion bravely, "she loves another, and tells me she is happy in her love."

Mr. Bellamy, upon this, quite gave way, and wrung his hands very wildly, for a man usually unemotional.

"She is infatuated, besotted, fascinated—call it what you will—by a scamp, a card-playing, tavern-haunting reprobate!"

"You amaze me, Mr. Bellamy."

"Perhaps you have heard of my nephew, Christopher Bellamy?"

Esdaile confessed moodily that he had.

"Did you ever hear any good of him?"

The squire gravely shook his head.

"If you had a sister, should he marry her?"

The squire thought not, with a shudder.

Old Julius Bellamy then clenched his fists, and burst out thus :—

"Yet he will marry my girl, in spite of me. There, pity an old man's miseries, and bear your own bravely. Good-bye, and God bless you, Esdaile."

And so the squire brought no wife to Garwood Priory yet.

Had Julia accepted the squire, this record of her woes would never have been penned. But Julia, for the sake of her cousin Christopher, refused Esdaile, and—HENCE THESE TEARS.





CHAPTER IV.

THE MONEY-LENDER'S THREAT.

BUT business is business, whether love prospers, or whether love sickens and dies. So a few days after his rejection, early in March, in a bitter frost, Lucas Raymond emerged from a dilapidated tenement in Barossa Place, Brompton. On a soiled card to the right of the parlour window ran an announcement that a mangle was kept. On a dirtier ticket to the left, it was declared that single gentlemen could be accommodated with beds. Now, Lucas Raymond was both single and the temporary occupant of one of the beds referred to.

He found the door-step obstructed by a

small boy in a red woollen comforter and a Scotch cap. The child wore a skimping pilot jacket, buttoned over tight. Under this, the comforter reappeared in the altered condition of fringe.

"If you please," explained the child, blowing upon his frozen finger-tips, "I was to be lifted up and ring three times. You see, I'm short."

"Then you want the second front bedroom?" enquired Raymond, turning up his own coat collar with a shiver.

"By the name of Raymond," added the boy in the intervals of a species of war-dance on the pavement.

"Meaning me," grunted Raymond, "I'm the second front bedroom. Come, you just keep quiet there, my young friend; you are not so cold as all that. You need not join the sect of the 'Convulsionists,' come, now!"

"I didn't know you with your hat on," stammered the boy. "Here's a letter from her"—unfolding one from a ragged scrap of newspaper.

"My sister-in-law," Raymond surmised, glancing at the direction, and breaking the

seal with an air of ill-humour. "Well, and what does my sister-in-law want now? I should not lose my breath with surprise if it was to be a loan."

"It's Mrs. Raymond," continued the lad, with chattering teeth; "she as rents mother's kitchens, and goes to chapel such a rare deal. We found her at her washing-tub in a specie of dimness. And the doctor said she wasn't altogether right when he come. And next the minister come, and he could make nothing of her. And now you're to come, and see if you can."

"Sounds serious," mused Raymond, with a puzzled face. "Can you carry a message correctly?—There, don't fling your arms about in that wild way."

"I've took a many," protested the boy, with offended dignity. "I've been here before."

"Then," returned Raymond, scratching his chin, "you are the boy she sends here for loans?"

"Yes," exclaimed the lad, with a gleam of intelligence, "she's a very loany woman."

Bless you, master, I goes to others besides you. Some gives, but mostly all grumbles. Mother now says that her lodger's loaning days are nearly over."

"Hum!" meditated Lucas, drawing a soiled glove on. "Look'ee here, my lad, I'll step round in a couple of hours.—You say so."

So the boy dismissed ran whistling towards Chelsea, and Raymond set his face west, against the freezing easterly breeze.

"Poor thing!" muttered Raymond, as he strode along. "A canting, weary, aggravating woman; but I can't think hardly of her now. Death has been busy of late with the Raymonds. Nothing prospers with us. We don't even, like other paupers, burthen the rates by a prolonged existence. This one infant of my sister-in-law's must, now it has just struck me, take the family land at my mother's death. That's all very well. Suppose the child takes the land, then who is to take the child? Well, I won't bother my head with these questions, until I have executed my master's most unpleasant errand. The

governor must take precedence over even family sickness ; inasmuch as the governor is a Tartar. So, after I have made these two young men of fashion apprehend that the patience of the ' Battersea Reversion ' (as I call my Company, compendiously) is exhausted, I will then obey Mrs. George Raymond's summons with all reasonable alacrity."

A few lines of explanation are necessary to unravel to the reader the condition and generations of these Raymonds—a prominent family in our narrative. Well, these Raymonds were yeomen, statesmen, or, in other words, small freeholders of a plot of land adjoining the estates of the Esdailes, squires of Garwood Priory, in Cropshire. This small hereditary patch marched on one side with the Esdaile boundary fence, on the other with Garwood town heath, which was common land. They had been settled here certainly above a century. We may, however, infer, that the original Raymond had been a squatter, who acquired his right by twenty-one years of supineness on the part of some

Esdaile's agent. Succeeding Raymonds enlarged their little lodgement on the soil by furtive nibblings at the squire's boundary line on this side, and by judicious cribbings from the waste lands on the other. In fine their title-deed was encroachment. This freehold bit was now four acres and a few roods in extent. On this, Lucas' father had raised, at his own expense, and to some extent with his own hands, a dwelling-place. This tenement was something better than a cottage, and somewhat worse than an average Crophire farm house. The father had died years since, leaving the life interest in the land and house to his widow. Now he left three sons, George, Lucas, and Matthew. Of whom in order. George, the eldest, to whom, at his mother's death, the land would descend in fee, did not remain long at home after his father's funeral. His mother was near in her habits and peevish in her disposition, so George preferred trying his chance in London, and Lucas soon followed his example. The widow and her youngest son Matthew, now only

remained at Garwood. Matthew was, unlike his brothers, easily repressed and of a feeble constitution. Still he was clever at his book, and became a pupil-teacher in the Garwood Grammar School. In a visit to the great neighbouring city of Blackwater, he contracted a chance intimacy with the son of an opulent brewer. Matthew, in due time, became a sort of half-tutor, half-companion to this young fellow and his brother; and only left them to marry, without one sixpence in prospect, the person whom we shall hereafter know as Mrs Matthew Raymond. After this union, he became assistant in a bookseller's shop, and only lived four years, leaving one posthumous son, Philip Raymond. George, the eldest, did not prosper either in the great city, and died a year back. Of his widow, Mrs. George Raymond, and his infant son Ralph, we have just received tidings through the medium of the boy in the comforter.

Now, last, for Lucas Raymond, a thick-set, sallow-faced man, rather under the middle height, a clean-shaved, short-haired, bullet-

headed personage, with a large massive jowl. A man like the first Napoleon. Keen-eyed, with firm, thin, clear-cut lips, and straight, fine short nose. For many years after his advent to town, Lucas occupied the position of one of the under-clerks in a firm of city attorneys. But, a few months before this narrative commences, two of the partners had retired, and Lucas received notice, that, owing to a reduction in the establishment, his services would be no longer necessary. While out of employment, he fell in with old Michaelson, the money-lender, who snapped up a clerk at once with any legal knowledge. So Lucas was at present in his employment,—a situation which only his poverty induced him to tolerate. But hunger has no laws. So Lucas, groaning in spirit, had become the usurer's drudge and jackal. With a philosophic shrug, he accepted and made the best of his degradation. Warily watching, meanwhile, for any employment more congenial, which fate might push within his reach.

Lucas has already briefly alluded to the

business on which he was now bound. He went at his master's bidding and behest, to bring under the notice of Mr. Christopher Bellamy and Mr. Basset Rutherford, two young gentlemen of pleasure and spirit, at their private residences, a somewhat startling item of intelligence. This was neither more nor less, than that Mr. Samuel Michaelson proposed, on the next day but one, to arrest them both on a bill for £600, for which they were jointly liable; unless such amount was paid by them into his banking account by noon on the succeeding Wednesday.

So we shall abandon genealogy and personal portraiture, to accompany Lucas Raymond on this unpleasant commission. In due time, he reaches the chambers of Mr. Christopher Bellamy in Mount Street. He rings, and is duly announced. Anticipating his arrival by a few minutes, we find in Mr. Christopher Bellamy's sitting-room, not only his fast friend and, of late, inseparable ally, Basset Rutherford, but an oily and obsequious personage, the foreman of Messrs. Runt and Ruby, jewellers, who

is submitting to their inspection various bracelets in morocco cases.

"That," said the foreman, raising a bracelet on his forefinger, "is an extremely neat and unobtrusive article. We made several like it for Lady Moldavia Square's bridesmaids; it's only eighty—dirt cheap!"

"I say, old fellow," appealed Christopher lazily to his associate, "I hardly know whether Lily would think that good enough. You see, she has got such cartloads of these gim-cracks already."

"Take my advice," whispered Rutherford, nudging his friend's elbow; "give it good, however small. Diamonds, old fellow; make it diamonds! All these stage girls go clean off their heads about diamonds. Rubbishy trinkets they get by the bushel; real diamonds very rarely, and then these look so well on the boards, especially when they are threading the mazes of a crisis in the ballet!"

"Let it be so," agreed Christopher, with assumed nonchalance. "Tell Runt, I take this thing. I suppose he never expects to be paid."

The tradesman smiled feebly, and rubbed his hands in some embarrassment. The joke went too much home, and was hardly a pleasant one, so he smiled once more with additional vacuity, and bowed repeatedly. Bowing committed him to nothing, and was a pleasant mode of tiding over the interval of awkwardness.

"I am sure," he murmured, twisting up his mouth dubiously, "that with a gentleman of Mr. Bellamy's connections, we need not mention any immediate settlement."

"Just so," laughed Bellamy; "really the confidence of your firm in human nature does one good. It is charmingly sanguine of Runt to expect that my connections will pay for this. Tell Runt I said so, and send him my blessing."

"Am I to leave the article?" faltered the jeweller, hardly knowing how far to accept in earnest Bellamy's bullying and bantering flourish of his own insolvency. "If so, I should venture to suggest—"

"Leave it here?" interrupted Bellamy, with a hoarse laugh; "certainly not, man.

Do you imagine I want this frippery for myself?"

The foreman brightened into instantaneous deference.

"But," drawled Bellamy, throwing himself down into an easy chair, with the air of a man utterly bored, "you can save me a world of trouble by leaving this case for me at the stage-door of the Pandora Theatre, directed to Miss Lily Roundabout."

The jeweller bowed himself out, mentally resolving to refer to his employers the problem of Bellamy's solvency.

"Send up that fellow in the passage," shouted Bellamy after the descending jeweller, "as you go down the staircase."

"Well, by Lucifer!" exclaimed Rutherford, regarding his friend with evident admiration, "you are a perfect daredevil, Bellamy; here are you, without a sixpence, buying diamonds! What possesses you?"

"Why," returned Bellamy, with dignity, lighting a cigar, "that little whippersnapper, Lord St. Vitus, had the audacity

to send Lily some presents the other day, and I don't choose to be outdone."

"But Lord St. Vitus has twelve thousand a year!"

"So ought I to have."

"Take care," counselled Rutherford in a lower tone, "our fair cousin Julia does not get wind of this presentation of brilliants."

"Julia knows her place," returned Belamy, with lofty assurance, "and can bide my time. Her turn will come. She worships the very ground I walk on, and is in all respects a commendable and sensible girl. She is devilish nice also—in her way—at least for a girl with so much money. By and bye, I mean to 'range myself,' as the Frenchmen say, and retire with her to connubial felicity and a handsome slice of my good uncle's accumulations. I shall cut you then, Rutherford, my boy. Ha, ha! you will be only a clerk in a cotton-mill, at Blackwater—a poor devil!"

"There is some one," interrupted Rutherford, a little hipped at this drollery, "scraping about behind that door of yours."

"True," cried Bellamy, "I forgot about him; it is that idiot, Vickers. I conclude he has no candle. Come in, Bob, in the devil's name, and don't scratch on that panel like a gigantic spider."

Entered a personage in gaiters and brown velveteen. A red wisp of neckerchief he wore, but associated with no vestige of shirt. His nose was flat and broken. His general expression betokened sullenness, and a proclivity to ardent drink. He seemed a bull-dog in human form. He might have been a gamekeeper; he might have been a prizefighter. He was certainly one of the varieties of the order London rough. He was at present concerned with pigeons, but he had passed through many phases, and visited several houses of correction. Bob Vickers acknowledged the presence of his patrons by endeavouring to wrench off a lock of his front hair, and explained that the door handle had eluded his grasp. Hence the mysterious sounds which preceded his entrance.

"Good evening, Bob," said Bellamy, carelessly enough.

"Gentlemen, each," responded Vickers, trifling with a straw.

"I am sorry to say, Bob," prefaced Bellamy with a cough, "that we must countermand those blue-rocks at Willesden to-morrow."

Mr. Vickers shook his head, and seemed much exercised in spirit.

"The fact is," interposed Rutherford, "that we have arranged to escort a lady down to Richmond to-morrow."

"I know'd as much," retorted Bob with much bitterness, spitting out the straw in the vehemence of his feelings. "It's always women that goes against the fancy. The harm those pretty innocents have done me and my birds is not to be bore, leastaways never to be reflected on. My anxiousness of mind in preparing them birds to do me credit in gameness, no mortal soul can here have no idea on. Gentlemen, I feel it only doo to myself to have my feelings respecting this ere put off."

"Indulge your feelings then, Bob," suggested Bellamy, with a gesture of impatience, "only be kind enough to take them

off these premises to the nearest ale-house, where, on the proceeds of this crown-piece, you can purchase sufficient stupefaction to forget the postponement of your favourites."

"My birds will never be so fit as tomorrow," grumbled Mr. Vickers, pocketing, however, the coin with alacrity, and adding with deep disdain, "A female could be took to the 'Star and Gaiters' anywhen! Why must she go interfering with my pigeons?"

At this juncture, the maid of all work entered the room, followed by Lucas Raymond.

"Who comes here, Sarah?" said Belamy, astride of a chair. "I am holding a levee this afternoon. Declare yourself, my friend. Why, by all that is unpleasant, it is Sam Michaelson's clerk!"

Lucas agreed to this description by slightly acknowledging his questioner, and placing his hat on the table.

"Damme, Raymond," chimed in Rutherford, with emphatic disgust, "what ill-wind blows you here, man?"

"Business, gentlemen!" responded Lucas curtly, and he proceeded to exhume various documents from a capacious side-pocket.

"Our little bill, I presume?" predicted Rutherford, with a grating burst of forced laughter.

"Governor," whispered Mr. Vickers, advancing his mouth close to Christopher's ear and giving his patron the full benefit of his heated respiration, "Governor, pass the word, and this chap with his bill goes down stairs again. A crown is a crown; and I bear no malice about they birds. Pass the word."

"All right, Bob," laughed Christopher, pushing away his ally. "Keep quiet in the corner there till you're wanted, which you won't be. Why, man alive, you reek like a walking brandy-keg!"

Mr. Vickers retired grumbling to the end of the room.

"Now then, Raymond, speak up," commanded Christopher with easy assurance.

"Mr. Michaelson's compliments, gentlemen—"

"I don't relish that exordium," interposed Rutherford.

"Michaelson civil, means Michaelson mischievous," commented Christopher.

"And he regrets extremely—" resumed Lucas, gravely.

"Worse and worse," from Rutherford in a sneer.

"Now for the shot," muttered Christopher with a wry face.

"But with regard, gentlemen, to that joint bill of yours."

"Want of taste this in Michaelson, to allude to such a trifle," sneered Christopher, crossing his arms.

"Now considerably overdue," pursued Lucas, glancing from one to the other.

"Why remind us of a circumstance so unpleasant?" interrupted Rutherford, beginning to whistle.

"He has sent me here to say," continued Lucas imperturbably, "that, if six hundred pounds are not lodged to his account by noon on Wednesday——"

"Let me conclude," broke in Rutherford, in rough, bantering insolence, "Michaelson,

in such an event, offers politely to renew our bill, and makes us a present of the beggarly interest."

And both young gentlemen laughed for some moments very heartily at the ludicrous idea of a money-lender foregoing any claims whatever.

"Gentlemen," protested Lucas, balancing himself uneasily from one leg to the other, "accept my assurance that this is no matter for merriment. Please, hear me out, for your own sakes."

Something in the manner of the man succeeded in sobering his hearers. Rutherford became uneasy; Christopher affected indifference, but became perfectly serious.

"Don't tell me," demanded Rutherford, in a nervous bluster, "that Michaelson will have the effrontery to arrest us!"

"I fear, gentlemen, he will," said Lucas simply, and with a look of quiet conviction.

"But he has threatened us so often," submitted Christopher, with an incredulous smile.

"But this time," insisted Lucas, shaking

his head, "he means real mischief. Look'ee here. I will stretch a point, and tell you this much. Michaelson has gone himself specially to retain a bailiff. He would not trust that commission to me. That speaks volumes in my opinion."

"The skulking wretch!" from one, with closed fist; "The execrable Hebrew!" from the other, contemptuously.

"Pass the word, governor," whispered Mr. Vickers, huskier than ever, emerging with laudable promptitude from his retirement.

"Take my word for it, gentlemen," said Lucas, gathering up his papers and hat, "and if you can get this money by Tuesday, do so."

"I believe you," said Christopher, grinding his teeth.

"Good evening, gentlemen," concluded Lucas.

"Stay!" bellowed Christopher, planting his back against the door.

"I tell you what, fellow," he hissed, with a menacing movement of the arm; "thank your stars that you leave this room with a

whole skin, after bringing us this insolent message."

"I am only a clerk," expostulated Lucas ;
"I have my orders, I must obey them or starve."

"Well, be off at once," pursued Christopher, livid with rage, moving aside from the door, "lest we should either of us think better of our tolerance. And, hark'ee here, Mr. Money-lender's clerk, tell your employer, with my compliments—the compliments of Mr. Christopher Bellamy, gentleman, to Samuel Michaelson, a dirty Jew—that his paltry money *shall* be paid to its last miserable farthing !"





CHAPTER V.

IN LOCO PARENTIS.

HAVING gladly wiped his hands of a most unpleasant commission, Lucas Raymond was now free to respond to the urgent summons of his sister-in-law. He, therefore, made his way with all available celerity from Mount Street, to the lodgings of the sick woman.

He found the invalid in a miserable underground apartment. Mrs. George Raymond, even in health, had been lean and haggard. Illness had naturally intensified her gaunt appearance. That she was seriously ailing, there could be no manner of question. The room, or rather cellar, was nearly bare of furniture. A

ragged slip of carpet, two broken-down chairs, and a kitchen dresser, struck the eye as the widow's most prominent possessions. On this table lay a pair of boots and several pawnbroker's duplicates. The bed itself presented an amorphous jumble of old wraps, shawls, and petticoats, huddled on above the soiled blankets and grey-looking bed-clothes. Two children were in the room.

"Well, how goes it, Gilboa?" demanded Lucas briskly, approaching the bedside with assumed cheeriness.

"Much the same," replied the sick woman, extruding a gaunt head from the mass of its heterogeneous envelopes, --much as tortoise does from its carapace.

"Who is with you?" interrogated Lucas, seating himself.

"Mrs. Matthew," whined the invalid. "She has just stepped out to renew my mixture. That's her boy playing with mine. Heigho! Oh, dear me!"

"So I guessed," pursued Lucas, chafing his hands. "The lads are like enough, now I come to notice them together. Our

family likeness is a noted one for transmitting itself."

"Brother-in-law," said Mrs. George, raising herself in the bed, "I sent for you to come. I had a right to summon you."

"I came readily, Gilboa," returned Lucas, with an attempt to look as if he meant it.

"I have never liked you," continued the widow, after a pause, with uncompromising frankness, and the full relish of enunciating an unpalatable truth.

"Don't let that distress you now," murmured Lucas, with unabated good humour; "we can't govern our fancies or dislikes."

"For why?" she persisted, ignoring his little attempt to palliate her unpleasant remark; "for why did I never feel drawn to you, brother of my husband? Because you were not one of the chosen people, and your mind was set upon heaping up perishable riches."

"You see," suggested Lucas mildly, "we can't all of us attend quite the same conventicle. I don't suppose, for one thing, there would be room. And, as regards earning money and saving it, haven't you

gone a little too far in the opposite direction ?”

Lucas glanced carelessly as he concluded, round her scanty furniture. The widow followed his eye, and her own flashed angrily.

“I am a righteous woman,” retorted Mrs. George, with unction. “I take no thought for the morrow.”

“Well, never mind our relative merits,” suggested Lucas, passing it off, “think of me as you please. Rate my virtues at zero, if the calculation comforts you. The question is, how I can help you now ?”

“I am a widow in Israel,” drawled Mrs. George, adopting a conventional snuffle, into which, when particularly impressive or peculiarly disagreeable, she subsided. “My child is one of the fatherless. I am not careful about things which concern this world. I have subsisted for some time past on the loans of the righteous.”

“Not entirely, Gilboa,” corrected Lucas gently. “I’ve helped you also, just now and then. Not that you are not welcome to it.”

"Hearken to him," retorted Mrs. George, with some unfairness, and considerable asperity; "he throws his charity in my teeth!"

"Come, come, be reasonable, sister-in-law."

"The loans," she interposed viciously, "of the unregenerate are as bitterness in my hand, and as gall in my mouth."

"But you take them, for all that," muttered Lucas, dropping his voice, and feeling his patience on the ebb.

This rejoinder of Raymond's the invalid only imperfectly caught; therefore, with characteristic spite, she thought well to put upon his whisper the most amiable interpretation that on the spur of the moment occurred to her.

"See, how he curses a sick woman!" she ejaculated, wiping the perspiration from her face. "Behold, how he shoots out his lips! He mutters evil against the fatherless, and confounds the cause of the widow. A snare shall take him unawares, and heavy things at his latter end!"

Having consoled herself with these re-

assuring predictions, Mrs. George drew the bed-clothes close above her ears, and breathed stertorously.

“Now, look you here, Gilboa,” remonstrated Lucas, laying his hand gently on the sick woman’s shoulder; “you are certainly very ill, and these bursts of petulance will go far to aggravate your disorder——”

“A net shall be laid for their feet,” growled the widow, in a sepulchral voice, below her wraps and blankets.

“Do be calm,” said Lucas, tapping the bed-clothes. “To wish every one who does not adopt your jargon into a pitfall or a snare, will not hurt them; but, beyond question, in your present state, will retard your own recovery——”

“You cast a proud look,” broke in the widow spasmodically, “on the poverty of my chamber. You sneered at my desolation.”

“Because,” explained Lucas, rubbing his knees, “a little diligence on your part might have made this room both comfortable and cleanly. I must, in self-defence, insist that

you are a most improvident woman. I happen to know that you have tired out the relieving-officer long since with your persistency and your—well—inaccuracies.”

“He is a man of Belial,” interrupted his sister-in-law, with a momentary flush on her pale face, and an air of being somewhat disconcerted; “he harries the children of the elect.”

“Whatever he is,” persisted Lucas, catching her up, “he told me that you had nearly been in—trouble on several occasions.”

“Paul was set in bonds,” retorted the sick woman sharply.

“Well, well,” soothed Lucas, with a shrug, “have the last word, and let us try to be cool. Now, do tell me what you want, and I will do my best to carry out your instructions; heathen as I am in your eyes, I intend to assist you, if you will only permit me. What shall I get?—physic, brandy, boots for the boy? Give it a name, as I am pressed for time.”

“Lucas Raymond,” said the invalid,

propping herself up on the pillow with one elbow, "a heathen you are, and a heathen you will continue; but I believe you will keep your word."

Lucas smiled, in spite of himself, at this apostrophe.

"Let me make the most of this scrap of your good opinion," he said, with a gravity which he found difficult to maintain.

"Vex me not with levity," reproved Mrs. Raymond, now seated upright in the bed, gaunt, and extremely formidable.

"I could not help it," said Lucas, with fingers upon his mouth.

"Listen, Lucas."

"I listen, Gilboa, and await you."

"It is of my child," prefaced Mrs. George, with a transition into a less defiant tone, "that I would speak to you. The family land—they tell me—descends to that orphan, when my late husband's mother is called to her rest. I heed not such things, but those who do heed them have so informed me——"

"And correctly informed you, Gilboa," he agreed, scanning the speaker narrowly.

"I have thought," pursued Mrs. George, with the air of an ill-used woman, "that, for some years, my mother-in-law has somewhat exceeded the period allotted to us in this vale of persecution and suffering!"

"An ingenious mode of translating your wishes into specious language," mused Lucas to himself, adding aloud, "she is old, certainly," and then Lucas coughed.

"Now, in case my mother-in-law's life should out-last mine," stated Mrs. George, with a tremor in her voice, "as, after all, seems likely enough, Mr. MacSion has urged me to appoint a guardian over the inheritance of the orphan."

"Is Mr. MacSion a lawyer?" demanded Lucas, with a sudden accession of interest.

"God forbid," protested Mrs. George, fervently, "Mr. MacSion is a saint."

"And wants to be appointed guardian?" hazarded Lucas, with a short dry laugh.

"Young man," sighed Mrs. Raymond, closing her eyes firmly, "you speak the words of truth."

"You mean to assent, of course," affirmed Lucas, resignedly.

"No such thing," denied the widow with curt decision.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Lucas in malicious amusement. "Then, I suppose, there *are* doubts about Mr. MacSion keeping *his* word!"

Mrs. George evaded the question, and again batted her eyelids in a way that suggested prevarication and evasive reply.

"Lucas," she replied, shifting her position, "you speak foolishly, after the manner of the Gentiles. Mr. MacSion has the care of all the churches."

"Come, sister-in-law," remonstrated Lucas, with an evident twinkle in his eye; "I could not venture, in my capacity of heathen and reprobate, to oust this shining clerical light, from a trust which only requires a little common heathenish honesty."

"Lucas," coughed the invalid, shuffling her shoulders about in the bed, "there is one law for the nations of the world, and

another law for the chosen. The regenerate cannot fall. All things are lawful to the elect."

"Trust property included," muttered Lucas, with contemptuous emphasis; "then, on the whole, an unconverted trustee is certainly preferable. He won't, at any rate, walk away with the money."

"Mr. MacSion," Mrs. Raymond went on to explain, with the air of a lawyer who held a bad brief, "is a zealot for the truth. The poor are always with him. The labourer in the vineyard must be paid. Moreover, I doubt if Mr. MacSion keeps any accounts, as the manner of the worldly is to keep them. Indeed, why should the just retain a perishable record of fleeting treasure?"

"Good!" broke in Lucas with some asperity. "Very fine indeed! The kernel of this long digression is, that I am to be saddled, willing or wayward, with this child. Let me tell you, that, to a single man, lodging in one bedroom, and only home at nights, a child is none the pleasantest of incumbrances!"

"He is your own brother's son," insisted the sick woman in eager grating accents, "the orphan of your eldest brother in glory!"

"Nice justice this," remonstrated Lucas, pacing the room in restless displeasure; "You saints are to have all the talk, and we poor heathen all the expense of their families. Look at me now! Your own lips and your whole gang of Convulsionists would pronounce me reprobate, a moral leper, a vessel of wrath. Who lavish these epithets with such easy and irresponsible freedom? Why a clique of so-called religionists, who will not trust each other with a five-pound note! And yet all the time revel in announcing themselves to outsiders as the salt of the earth. These good people contract reckless marriages, and throw their orphans upon the unregenerate. They think it wrong to save, and hold it praiseworthy to dip their hands into other folk's pockets. Bah! Let Mr. MacSion take the child and his money too, for all that I care!"

Mrs. George had plenty of craft, for all

her gusty parade of extreme simplicity. She saw now, at a glance, that she had pressed Lucas too far. She therefore changed her tactics, and moaned humbly enough :

“ Lucas,” she wept, “ for pity’s sake be guardian to the child. I have said rashly, and I have no right to cumber you with this trust. But, O Lucas, do not turn me away !”

She had dropped her conventional manner for the first time in this entreaty. She spoke now naturally and impressively enough in the simple character of a mother. She was sincerely anxious for her child’s future welfare. The genuine feeling of the woman gave a dignity to her in asking this, in strange contrast to her previous utterances. Lucas became instantly mollified.

“ Why can’t you be always yourself, Gilboa ?” he answered gently, resuming his seat by the bed. “ There, I don’t refuse. Ease your mind on that score. Only for the moment I relieved myself by a vigorous grumble. I’ll look after this brat,

sure enough, if you should happen—not to get better.”

Mrs. Raymond at once relapsed, having gained her point, into that sanctimonious manner, which had grown upon her, with daily use, till it had become almost a second nature.

“Ah, Lucas,” she snuffled, turning up her eyes, “you will never learn a righteous resignation.”

“So,” thought Lucas, scratching his chin, “I suppose I had better take no notice, and ignore this unctuous reproof.”

Meantime, Mrs. George had raised herself sufficiently to regard the two children playing at the foot of the bed.

“Lead my Ralph to his uncle, Philip,” she beckoned to the child of Mr. Matthew Raymond.

As for Ralph, he did not budge one inch at his mother’s bidding; but young Philip seized his playfellow’s chubby hands and led him forward.

“Humph!” considered Lucas, pinching his nephew’s ribs after the manner of a prize sheep at an agricultural show; “it

strikes me this ward of mine may be considered a rather backward infant, eh, Gilboa?"

"It is yet an over-tender lamb," she argued with a sniff; "the wisdom of the old serpent will come in good time—in good time."

"But it need not stare quite so vacantly, need it?" suggested Lucas, waving a thick forefinger at his nephew, who remained wholly unaffected by this mark of avuncular attention.

"The child is thoughtful beyond its years," threw in the mother apologetically.

"It certainly does not seem to talk much," coincided in dry irony, the uncle. "Now, that son of Matthew's—he seems a sharp enough lad."

"A child of wrath," whispered Mrs. George in amiable comment, "an imp of Satan, never resting a moment, save to do evil. For fire, water, windows, dirt, and general mischief, that boy has no equal."

Having concluded this adaptation from the litany to illustrate the backslidings of

her nephew, Mrs. George kissed her own child with increased relish.

"Boys will be boys," consoled Lucas, quoting that most mischievous of common-places.

"Ah!" said Mrs. George, with a gulp. "I would soon alter that."

"Suppose," suggested Lucas, evidently at a loss how to make any further demonstration towards the stolid child, "suppose I try that boy of yours with a bright brand-new sixpence."

And he produced one from his waistcoat pocket with a tooth-pick.

The boy's eye instantly brightened, and out came his hand.

"Ah!" watched Raymond, evidently gratified; "he notices that, sure enough. He may push his way and get on in the world yet."

"Mammon," remarked the sick woman, scornfully, "filthy mammon!"

"Now come you here, master Ralph," pursued Raymond, encouraged by his late success to raise his nephew by the waist, and to turn him round and over for inspec-

tion, as if he were a sample of dry goods.

"Pretty darling!" exclaimed the mother, nodding at her oscillating offspring.

"Well, my lad," said Raymond, replacing the child on its feet, "we will do the best we can with you if you come to our care. But in our humble anticipation you will never ignite the Thames."

"Lucas," reminded his sister-in-law petulantly, "do or do you not mean to leave this orphan to desolation?"

"Meaning Mr. MacSion," muttered Lucas between his teeth; "desolation indeed!"

"I can bear even this," she went on querulously, "if your heart is hardened."

"Stuff, Gilboa," affirmed Lucas, "I've told you once and I tell you again. You may consider me its guardian. Where else on earth is the child to go? My mother must be in her dotage by this time. And then she never relished George's taking up with you."

"She never aided me," complained Mrs. George, "though I have wasted many a

penny stamp upon her. Let her be rewarded with——”

“There,” interposed Lucas hurriedly; “never you mind settling that. As to the child, I give you my word that such fare as I have, he shares it.”

“Thanks,” murmured Mrs. George, feebly extending a lean wasted hand beyond the bed-clothes. “I am relieved in mind, but in body no better—no better.”





CHAPTER VI.

AN UNEXPECTED RECOGNITION.

ON the morrow of the day, during which Lucas conveyed the money - lender's ultimatum to the young men, and afterwards adopted his nephew Ralph at the bed-side of the ailing mother; that next morning Mrs. Hannah Armitage, landlady in ordinary to Lucas Raymond, left her tenement in Barossa Place in charge of a girl-drudge, her only assistant in the house, a young lady of trodden-down heels and tender years, with this precise parting statement; that she was going across the Fulham Road to buy herself a quarter of a pound of tea, and that she would be back in ten minutes.

Why Mrs. Armitage did not return in that period we shall now endeavour to explain.


She crossed the Fulham Road it is certain, with her head well towards the grocer's, but that tea-shop, on this particular occasion, she was never destined to enter. And for this singular reason, she beheld, before her on the pavement, the back of a tall, well-made man walking with a male friend in the direction of London; then, strange to say, Mrs. Armitage instantly forsook her tea, and her slave-girl; then, casting to the winds her promise of ten minutes, Hannah followed stealthily in the wake of this figure to London likewise.

It was a dreary trudge to Hannah, for the objects of her pursuit did not seem in the least disposed to hurry themselves. They sauntered, they stared in at shop-windows, they lit cigars and threw them away, they met friends, they were careful of their boots at crossings.

Down the Brompton Road, along Piccadilly, up Park Lane, then at right angle into Oxford Street; where at last her chase was destined to conclude, at the doors of

the "Crown and Sceptre" tavern, between which she observed these figures, which she had followed, pass. Hannah hovered about the entrance among several blowsy women redolent of gin, who ostensibly sold shirt-buttons and violet-bunches tied up with bass-matting. The glass portals of the gin-palace swung out and in on restless hinges. Hannah ventured to crane forwards now and then, and stole a furtive glance inside. The two men, whom she had followed, were drinking and chatting with the young lady at the bar. Hannah seemed to recall this girl's features, somehow; but at last it came into her mind that she had met her lodger Lucas Raymond walking out this identical barmaid [on one particular Sunday; so, hailing this, for her own purposes, as a most lucky coincidence, she determined, when these two young men had gone out, to claim acquaintance with the maiden of the raven ringlets.

The tall stranger, in due time, tossed off a glass of Cognac, and kissing his hand jauntily to the attendant Hebe behind the beer-engine, strolled out of the tavern,



humming an opera tune. His comrade tumbled out after him. Hannah cowered behind the clump of drowsy, bloated apple-girls that besieged the portals of the place. Having watched the two men away to a safe distance, Hannah went inside, and, to colour her entrance, demanded a glass of ale. A sodden-eyed workman, with a squat figure and high shoulders, now stood addressing the barmaid. He rattled in one hand a number of lock-picks, strung on a metal ring. At his feet lay a rush-basket with some more implements of his trade. As Hannah came in, he said, raising a pewter pot :

“Well, niece, I call that tall one a real born gentleman, and, in his absence, I drink his health and prosperity.”

“I think, uncle, you have had nearly enough,” said the barmaid, not unkindly, with a sort of persuasive and pitying smile. “Get home, now, there’s a good old man, and try and keep this new place of yours.”

“I don’t fear for work, Harriet,” he ejaculated, in semi-drunken self-assertion. “There is no workman like myself in

Marylebone for locks. I fear for work! Pooh! Let them discharge me! Keep a man of genius always sober!—Pshaw!—it is never to be done. The second-rate men are your abstemious ones. I defy the pack of master locksmiths!”

“Now, uncle,” she remonstrated, with a hand on his wrist, “the best workman in England is useless, if, when he be required, the chances are, he will be found incapable of work.”

“What is a man to do when he is thirsty?” hiccoughed the uncle. “Answer me that, my dear. You live by thirst, Harriet; so don’t you go against it.”

“I wish,” said his niece shrugging her shoulders, “that long fellow had thought twice before supplying you so recklessly with funds to indulge your failings.”

“A prince he was!” chuckled Joseph, rubbing his hands. “I say, give me generosity like yonder tall one’s. ‘Lend me a pound, sir,’ said I (never laid eyes on him before). ‘A cool request,’ said he; and flings me down one from his waistcoat pocket, with the air of an emperor. ‘Take

my acknowledgement ?' said I ; ' Write your address in my pocket-book,' he laughs, ' and you shall work it out for me in locks and picks, some day.' Now I call that the grand manner, the style of a prince !" concluded the locksmith rapturously.

" I call it bounce and show off," corrected his less enthusiastic niece. " The other fellow had a hang-dog kind of look, the last kind of man, that other one, whom I would care to marry ; though I am further from marriage than ever, uncle. I have just sent off my young man, Lucas. Heigho !"

Hannah, sipping her ale, became attentive.

" A good fellow," Harriet pursued, with a little short sigh ; " but older than I was by ten years, and poor as a weazel."

" You are a girl of foresight," applauded her uncle, producing a clay pipe and filling it. " Your head is well screwed on. They will not pick your brains easily, my child."

" I explained to my lover," the girl went on, with an affectation of carelessness in

her manner, contradicted by a look of real distress in her eyes, "that on his present income, any idea of marriage would be moonshine and folly, Uncle Joseph."

"Right, Harriet," exclaimed Joseph the locksmith, smacking his lips; "marry rich! rich! and be a credit to your family, and pension off your poor old uncle."

"You had better go now," said Harriet, with a yawn. "Pension you indeed! Get along!"

"Joseph Behrends is agoing," spoke the gentleman, trying to coax one more drain out from an empty tumbler, and giving his ring of keys an affectionate hitch and a final tinkle.

"And you will try," she smiled, coaxingly, "to keep your place with Messrs. Ward and Holdfast, now, won't you, Uncle Joe?"

"I will remain," responded Joe with a rather maudlin attempt at dignity, "so long as my feelings is respected by the firm, and no longer."

"And then, Uncle Behrends?—"

"Kind friends will come forward, and provide," returned Joseph, in an access of hopeful and sanguine vagueness.

"I won't, for one," denied the niece, amused in spite of her irritation; "if you include me,—my provision of funds for your idleness is at an end."

"Then," murmured Joe resignedly, like a comfortable fatalist as he was, "I can go to the Bastile."

"Take care," she reproved, with a shake of her ringlets, "you don't drift into worse places before you land there."

"Meaning trouble, my dear?" he questioned with a short abrupt laugh.

"Ah, gaol, Portland, colonies!" amplified Harriet Behrends, growing vexed, in an ominous voice; "your trade is very liable to a special class of temptations."

"I am off," grunted Joe, tilting himself abruptly in the direction of the entrance; "my feelings are wounded at the insinuation, and I can only say 'good morning' after that."

"He has forgotten his basket," said Harriet, after Joseph had squeezed himself

out ; then, raising her voice, she called to a curly-headed potboy, " Be a good lad, Fred, and run after him with this—the tiresome old wool-gathering drone !"

" Arter old Beer-ends ?" enquired the boy, who pretended to believe this to be Joe's appellation, bestowed in recognition of his well-known thirstiness.

Harriet laughed, boxed the boy's ears mildly, and then laughed again.

" Yes, after my uncle, young impudence," she said. " Now ma'am, what can I do for you ?" and she turned to the other inmate of the place.

" If you please," began Hannah Armitage, in a tremor of agitation, " I am Lucas Raymond's landlady."

" Is he unwell ?" returned Harriet, with restless movement and a quick, anxious glance.

" He is in good health," pursued Hannah with increased pallor. " You have heard him mention Mrs. Armitage of Barossa Place, Chelsea ?"

" He has done so, often," assented Harriet, stealing a glance at this strange-

looking female ; “and I readily recognize you from his previous descriptions.”

“Did he say,” questioned Hannah, in a grim saddened way, “that I resembled a woman taken out of her shroud ? Did he say that I moved like a ghost among the healthy living creatures that surround me ? Did he say something after this sort ?—Nay, I know he did !”

“Well,” hesitated the barmaid, trifling with the stem of a wine-glass, and feeling a cold shiver run creeping gradually down her spine, “something of the kind, certainly, but not nearly so uncomplimentary, as you have put it yourself, ma’am.”

“He said truth then—every word,” cried Hannah with her hand to her forehead. “Oh, young woman ! I am in urgent need, for the love of heaven assist me !”

Harriet Behrends crimsoned deeply at this appeal. Was this wild agitated woman in full possession of her faculties ? Beggar, she could hardly be. Why had her need driven her specially to the bar of the “Crown and Sceptre ?” While Harriet debated on these points to herself, Hannah

continued in hurried eagerness to question her :

“ That tall gentleman, who is he ?”

“ I never saw him before to-day,” replied the barmaid in perfect candour.

“ You don’t know where he lives, then ?” pursued Hannah, with a glance of dismay and disappointment.


“ They were both utter strangers,” said Harriet, shaking her head.

“ Why did they come here ?” went on Hannah, while her thin hands trembled with nervousness ; “ ah ! you cannot know how much may depend upon your answer !”

“ To engage a billiard table for ten o’clock to night,” considered the barmaid, with her finger on an entry in an open ledger. “ I have booked the table in the name of Bellamy.”

“ Bell,” corrected Hannah, diffidently to some extent, and with a grain of hesitation.

“ It stands as Bellamy here,” insisted the girl, reaching the book over the counter. “ See, it reads plainly. Still I may have heard wrong. But it sounded to me so.”



"Perhaps," suggested Hannah, ingeniously, "the other man gave the order, and said, 'reserve a table to-night for Bell and me.'"

"I think not so," considered Harriet.

"Show me this billiard room which they have engaged," prayed Hannah, with a beseeching look. "If you have any pity for a sister in great need, lead me there!"

"It is not usual," hesitated the barmaid, "in fact quite the reverse."

"My sorrows are not usual sorrows either," returned Hannah with a deep sigh.

"Come," agreed Harriet, at length impulsively, "I will just run up with you for one moment, that cannot harm anyone, but I might get into trouble, so let us make haste."

The two women went upstairs, and remained absent some five minutes. They re-entered the bar apparently in warm debate.

"Then you will let me come to-night, at half-past nine?" Hannah was pleading; "for pity's sake don't refuse me."

"Really," faltered the barmaid with a

scared look, "your request is so very extraordinary——"

"If you only knew my wrongs," urged Hannah, drawing her breath quickly, "you would not say so."

"But," remonstrated Harriet, "it might cost me my situation if Mr. Vats, my employer, were to learn that I had consented to——"

"Hush," interrupted Hannah, clutching the barmaid's wrist with fingers that crushed it like a vice. "Hush, there are customers coming in; look here, Miss Behrends, I *must* come to-night, but I will bring you a note from Lucas Raymond to convince you, that I am honest and have no unworthy motive in what I require you to do for me."

"Mind, I promise nothing," cried Harriet, apparently more inclined towards concession, "and I must say, Mrs. Armitage, that you have given me a start indeed."

"At half-past nine," whispered Hannah, with an emphatic nod, and pulling back the tin-shod swinging door, she was lost to view.

That night Lucas Raymond sat chatting with his landlady in the little kitchen at Barossa Place. It was his habit to do so when the toils of the day were concluded. Besides Hannah's society the kitchen fire was an additional inducement. So Lucas sat in his slippers warming his feet, while a pair of muddy boots, drawn off and tilted up against the fender, were drying for tomorrow's peregrinations.

Hannah was hemming a duster, and they were alone, with the exception of Hannah's clock in its long case in the passage, which almost seemed to make a third with its very emphatic tickings. Hannah had imported this time-piece as a family heirloom from the country. Great was the store she set by it. A full moon coloured and humoured into a human countenance appeared on its face. It had been made on purpose for her maternal grandfather and bore the twelve letters — THOMAS BUTTON—round the face to represent the horal series.

"I wish," began Lucas, turning his boot over like a piece of toast to its unroasted

side, "to-morrow's job of Michaelson's were well over. I can't help feeling nervous about it."

"What kind of business now?" asked Hannah, without looking up from the duster.

"An arrest of two young gentlemen," pursued Lucas, stretching his legs out luxuriously.

"Poor fellows!" compassionated Hannah. "Yours must be a dreadful trade."

"I do not pity that tall scamp," went on Lucas, half to himself, with a jerk of his chin; "he is a noisy, bouncing, bullying pickle. Serve him richly right, say I. A fellow whom no man could trust, nor, for the matter of that, no woman either."

Hannah gave a slight shiver and began to sew rather more slowly.

"That fellow," mused Lucas, resting his chin on his hand, "has a history already, I'll be bound: though young in years, I believe he is old in vice."

"What is he called?" enquired Hannah, again accelerating the pace of her needle. She made the query in a tone of the faintest interest.

"That would be telling office secrets," observed Lucas, screwing up the corners of his mouth; "we never mention names beyond our shop. For why? who would patronize a usurer, who went up street and down street crying, Cornet Smash owes me a thousand and Sir Percival Bolt two. Oh, yes! Oh, yes!"

"It was only conversation," replied Hannah, impassively; "the name is nothing to me nor the man either. I knew a tall, wicked man once——"

"London is full of long-legged scamps," interrupted Lucas with a sneer. "The length of their limbs enables them to walk all the faster in the direction of the dogs. Though why dogs and old Harry are synonymous, I never could clearly see."

"Well," said Mrs. Armitage, closing the subject, "I hope he will be taken quietly."

"So do I," returned Lucas with a yawn; "what a pleasant thing hope is! And now, Mrs. Armitage, I have a decided inclination to disappear beneath a blanket."

Lucas rose, holding his flat candlestick,

but Hannah laid a thin hand on his arm and detained him.

"I have a favour to ask you," faltered his landlady, watching him narrowly: "you must write me a few lines before you go up to your room."

"Lines!" exclaimed Lucas, surprised, dropping his snuffers, "to whom, and about what?"

"To Miss Behrends at the 'Crown and Sceptre.'"

"Harry Behrends! God bless me, what can you want with her?"

"She is—to help me, provided—" paused the landlady.

"Provided; well?"

"You, whom she knows, will give me a reference for respectability and so forth."

"Help you to a situation?" hazarded Lucas. "Mind, I don't turn out under a fortnight's notice. I won't allow my landlady to run away from her business. No, no."

"She is to place me in a particular situation," evaded Mrs. Armitage, with a cough of prevarication.

"Well, I never attempt to fathom your plans," assented Lucas, with a baffled smile, "but as for the reference, that is yours with all the pleasure on earth."

Lucas produced a stump of pencil, and tearing off the blank half of a letter, wrote,

"DEAR HARRIET, — The bearer, Mrs. Armitage, my landlady, is a worthy woman, trustworthy and respectable. It will be a personal favour to myself, if you can help her in any way. I still droop under what you told me 'between the lights.' You will understand my allusion. God bless you all the same, dear old girl. Yours till death us do part, LUCAS."

Enclosing this in a cover, he sealed it at Hannah's guttering tallow candle; and then handed it over to his landlady with an air of business.

"That contains all you require," he explained, rubbing his eyes. "She is a girl of gold, and will do you a good turn if she can, depend upon that."

Hannah became really earnest in her grateful thanks.

"And now," said Lucas, opening the door, "what says my friend, Thomas Button? Nine o'clock. Good. We keep early hours in Barossa Place. Good-night, ma'am. I will be bail you won't be long up after me."

"I don't know," hesitated Hannah, avoiding his eye, "I think not, but often some household matter turns up at the very last minute, and then I am late enough."

"Good-night."

Hannah watches him up the staircase, listens in an attitude of attention for the closing of his bedroom door. The moment after this sound reaches her a sudden change seems to invade her apathy of pose, her listlessness of expression; she bends down and hastily rakes out the kitchen fire. She produces with equal celerity a bonnet and shawl from a side-cupboard with which she rapidly arrays herself. This done, she steals silently from the kitchen up into the entrance passage. Noiselessly she uncloses the house-door; and very gently fastens it behind her. She walks at once across the

road to the Queen's Elm. An omnibus is starting; she springs inside. She is borne away towards London. Lucas upstairs, utterly unconscious of her exit, is about to seek in slumber oblivion from the cares of the Battersea Fields Discount and Reversion Company.





CHAPTER VII.

VERGES ON FORGERY.

A HANDSOME fellow, tall, and lightly built, dark as a gipsy in complexion, with coal-black curly hair, a high aquiline nose, a slight moustache, and an insolent expression of features, Christopher Bellamy comes again before us in person. His companion, shorter, but still tall, with good, but rather thick features; the mouth bad and mean, the teeth white and over-large; hair brown, and bushy whiskers; a sullen, downward look; an inability to look you in the face; an elaborate toilet—Basset Rutherford. Walk round St. Paul's about luncheon-time any day, and you will find Basset Rutherford's

double in numberless City clerks. To be sure of seeing a duplicate to Christopher Bellamy, we must extend our area of search; you *may* light upon him anywhere, but to be certain of doing so, a visit at Rome to the artists' quarter would be nearly indispensable.

In fact, Rutherford belonged to a native, Bellamy to an exotic, species. Bellamy was, to all intents, an Englishman, and had seldom crossed the Channel as yet; still he was in England a casual type, beyond its geographical limits.

They were in deep consultation, these two young men; and were making a miserable pretence of playing a game at billiards, to mask the real anxiety of their position.

The hour was eleven o'clock at night; the scene, the billiard-room of the "Crown and Sceptre" tavern, in Oxford Street. Such a situation would have been incomplete without brandy and cigars. In most youthful entanglements, these ominous stage-properties are seldom far from the elbows of the persons implicated.

"Why don't you score something, Bel-

lamy?" broke out Rutherford, impatiently, at last. "This game is interminable."

"Vote it a drawn one, then," suggested Bellamy, lounging away from the table to an adjacent divan. "Billiards being then for the present dismissed, it is proposed that this meeting do now resolve itself into a committee of ways and means."

"I'm cured of joking for the present," returned Rutherford, with a gloomy face and an expletive.

"And do devote its best and undivided energies to the consideration of the domestic—hem!—difficulty," continued Bellamy, with a short laugh, and a glance of ill-disguised contempt at his companion.

Both young men puffed at their cigars for some moments in silence. Rutherford was restless, Bellamy pretended to be buoyant and roystering.

"I rise to move and speak to the first resolution," resumed Bellamy, throwing himself back into an easier position, "that seven hundred pounds be procured before noon to-morrow, and paid into the account of Samuel Michaelson, Israelite, by his

grateful clients, friends, and well-wishers, Basset Rutherford, and Christopher Bellamy, Esquires, one of Blackwater, in the county Palatine of Tancaster, the other of the parish of St. George's, Hanover Square, in the county of Middlesex."

"How can you laugh off such a perplexity as this?" demanded Rutherford, in despondent irritation, kicking out viciously at a sofa leg.

"That's my way," replied Bellamy, boisterously, with an airy wave of the arm. "Looking sad never mended a bad business yet. I mean to crow as long as I can. I'm a Frenchman, I fancy, by temperament—in my excess of exuberant animal activity. But don't suppose, for all that, that I fail to perceive that my neck is about to be wrung—metaphorically."

"Do try and be serious," entreated Rutherford, with another oath; "as I understand this Michaelson won't renew, and we are jointly and severally liable for this bill of seven hundred pounds——"

"All we have to decide," interrupted

Bellamy, in sarcastic explanation, "is where the pounds have to come from."

"My good fellow, they won't come," said Rutherford, with hopeless decision, bringing the butt end of his cue down savagely upon the floor.

"But they must," reasoned his friend, sanguine and incisive. "The alternative to the non-arrival of certain miserable pounds being, that your social character and commercial credit are destroyed, and that mine are involved in a common demolition."

"The diagnosis of our two cases is supremely correct," allowed Rutherford, smiling bitterly. "Whether they admit of curative treatment, is a wider question. On this head, I crave leave to continue sceptical."

"Hear me out," pursued Bellamy, raising his fore-finger. "Now, I say this, that, if the instinct of self-preservation can allowedly justify anything from manslaughter downwards; I maintain that we, each and all, possess an imperative instinct, to preserve and defend his or her particular cha-

racter, justifying the use of all means short of manslaughter."

"I cannot assent to this," answered Rutherford, moodily and gravely, "until I learn the actual weapons which you propose to catch up against these two house-breakers, bankruptcy, and ruin."

"Never mind similes," broke in Bellamy, with some petulance; "survey the matter practically. There are dozens of rich men, there are numberless wealthy firms, who could lend us this seven hundred pounds, and never feel the loss, even if the debt eventually became a bad one."

"Granted," replied Rutherford coolly; "so, by all means proceed, for bad the debt would certainly become, with us for debtors."

"Now here," said Bellamy, smiling, "are two promising, handsome young men—I detest mock modesty—who are about to receive financial annihilation at the hands of the Battersea Fields Discount and Reversion Company, known, on nearer view, as old Sam Michaelson, the money-lender—that phantom firm of blood-suckers gradu-

ally contracting, upon nearer and more familiar view, into one actual and incarnate old horse-leech. Owing to the infernal machinations of this obdurate Hebrew, we have simultaneously reached that stage of pecuniary dryness, which long experience of the human sponge has taught the wary Michaelson to recognise with unerring instinct. A period at which, in treating the great natural order of the *Spongiadae*, he abandons suasive, and betakes himself to legal, arguments. Now, do you mean to tell me to sit still and do nothing?—that your expectations of partnership in the Blackwater firm are to receive a death-blow?—that my engagement with Julia Bellamy is to be cancelled, by which I hope to secure a nice girl, and a provision for life? Is this a time to be scrupulous?”

“Clearly not,” agreed Rutherford, with a volley of imprecations; “but let me interrupt your eloquence, and gently remind you that, apart from rhetoric—an excellent thing in its way—the plain question returns, how are we to obtain seven hundred pounds by noon to-morrow?”

"From our brains, if you must know," struck in Bellamy, with a sneer.

"Mine are hopelessly sterile," retorted Rutherford, looking down. "Your brain must coin these guineas for us both."

"If we could come to one mind in this matter," whispered Bellamy, eyeing his friend with some doubt, "an hour would settle the whole difficulty."

"I would assume any mind," pondered Rutherford, with his legs astride, "to keep my situation at Blackwater, and retain my uncle's favour."

"Look'ee here, Rutherford," Bellamy went on, in a menacing tone, to explain, "I suppose you can realize the full effects of to-morrow's exposure. We become ragged, penniless, degraded; men without credit or character, living from hand to mouth, starving on crusts and refuse. The first necessity will make us thieves—the first opportunity, sharpers."

"Be silent," hissed Rutherford, grown very pale, in his companion's ear; "for God's sake, spare me these vile anticipations!"

"You must listen," insisted Bellamy, with a firm grasp of emphasis upon the other's arm; "you must listen, or I shall never stir your indolence to action. Else, when I propound my scheme, you will put me coolly off with some trite moral dogma, some old-wife allusion to honour and principle."

"Test me," proposed Rutherford, breathlessly, "I will go certain lengths."

"How cautious we are," sneered Bellamy, raising his hand out, "we will go certain lengths! By Heaven, just consider this! a man has been convicted of stealing, has worked out his three months of treadmill for the offence; his time up, he is turned loose upon society. To reform? I tell you the man can't reform, no one will believe in his reformation. So with us, after to-morrow the respectables will ticket us worthless; and worthless we shall be, for any subsequent effort on our parts to amend will only stamp us in their eyes as hypocrites as well as knaves. And, for myself, I confess, that to practise virtue and get credit only for vice, exceeds

both my patience and sense of obligation. Consequently, if you are fantastic and won't stave off this smash of ours to-morrow, I mean to drift to the dogs resignedly ever after ; and I suspect that you will be found floating not very far behind me in the same deplorable direction."

"I see all that," muttered Rutherford, chewing his under-lip, "and yet—could no remedy be found short of actual criminality?"

"Don't use hard words," protested Christopher, faintly changing colour. "I maintain, that in this dilemma it is better to swallow one little bit of sharp practice, and live respectably ever after, than to strain at this gnat and allow ourselves to be branded as disreputable."

"I must think this over," said Rutherford, with gloomy hesitation ; his face had become extremely pale, and his lips had begun to twitch nervously.

"There is no time for this luxury of deliberation," spoke Bellamy, in a bullying voice. "I must have your answer now or never."

"Your plan then—" enquired the other reluctantly, setting his teeth.

"I shall not spur an unwilling horse much longer, my good fellow," remarked his friend, with a dark look. "My patience is nearly exhausted. This complication is no more mine than your own. You are no help—I could bear that—but an active hindrance and impediment."

"I beg your pardon, Bellamy," interposed the other, scared and overborne, "but I am nearly distracted by anticipations of to-morrow. For God's sake, overlook my crabbedness, and propound your scheme."

"I will," assented Bellamy mollified, in a cheery voice; "a short preface of my family affairs is, however, indispensable. You know, I am engaged to Julia Bellamy, my cousin. Your mental comment is, worse luck for her, poor girl!"

"You surely never mean to drag Miss Bellamy into this entanglement?" cried Rutherford, evidently disgusted, and obviously astonished.

"That's as she behaves, and events

shape themselves," returned Bellamy, coolly.

"But really, Bellamy, a lady—upon my word—you know—come, come, my good fellow!"

"Listen, Rutherford," said his friend, with harsh perspicuity, "and remember, that rough scrapes must dispense with fine feelings. Julia's promise has made us almost man and wife. A rash promise, if you please, and given to an embarrassed man. What follows? I regret the necessity, but some shadow of my complications must in the nature of things reach her. There is a virtual contract between us for better and for worse. The worse happens to preponderate just at present."

"Poor girl!" murmured Rutherford, absently, "poor girl!"

"Look you here," pursued Bellamy, warmly; "this poor girl, as you are pleased to call her, has lately tried her hand at somewhat perilous tactics. My respected uncle, Mr. Julius Bellamy, adores the territorial aristocracy; our mutual acquaintance, Esdaile, represents this kind of thing.

Esdaile is good enough to pay court to Julia—observe—my Julia. Old Bellamy is in raptures, and, suspecting that I am on the best of terms with his daughter, shoulders me off metaphorically to perdition. Actually, forbids me the house. After my removal, Esdaile calls repeatedly. Things being so, my affairs come to a crisis. Who is my worst enemy in all this? plainly Mr. Esdaile of Garwood."

"Granted; but what bearing has your dislike of Esdaile upon our difficulties?" blurted out Rutherford, changing colour.

"Esdaile has lately come of age," pursued Christopher; "they roasted several oxen I hear in honour of the event. It is a mercy they did not roast him, their stupid, heavy, bovine squire, in mistake. He is spending royally in town the accumulations of a long minority. He is only a bumpkin fresh from butter-milk, though his pockets are full of bank-notes. He has been told, that the surest way of rubbing bucolic rust into London polish is—to spend. He therefore keeps a good balance at his bankers', and spend he *shall*."

"A notable scheme," added Rutherford, with a sickly attempt at a smile; "so we pay our debts, and marry the lady by borrowing from our rival's pockets. I see!"

"As a mole does, no further than the dust at his nose," retorted Bellamy, saucily; "no, most simple youth; who ever lent a friend in difficulty seven hundred actual and solid pounds? The solvent man may with excruciating reluctance go so far as a five-pound note for a blood-relative; the more generous insolvent lends all he has—his name!"

"I had rather leave Esdaile out of our scheme," said Rutherford, "he lives too near my uncle."

"You have a brother in orders," remembered Christopher, with some abruptness; "I may take it for granted he can't help you at this pinch—except," he added cynically, "with good advice."

"The last person in the world," interposed Rutherford, changing colour, "to whom at this juncture it would be politic for me to apply. *Imprimis*, I hate my

brother cordially. Unfraternal that, but very usual."

"That is the way the wind lies, is it?" commented Christopher, treating the announcement as a matter of course.

"Then you see," narrated Rutherford, with a crafty leer, "up to a short time back Gerrard was my uncle's pet, myself nowhere in the old gentleman's favour. But Gerrard at his first curacy must needs marry a coast-guard's daughter, so my uncle won't look at him now, and I rise to the post of favourite. Now look'ee, Christopher, my boy, if I hinted of my embarrassments to Gerrard, like enough, he would cause my scrapes to reach my respected uncle's ears; who might forgive him the female in the preventive service, on the strength of my deeper iniquities. Unfraternal jealousy, I repeat, but terribly usual."

"In short," quoted Christopher, with a curl of the lip, "a man's foes shall be those of his household. Instance, your brother and my uncle."

"So we dismiss that scheme," chimed

in Rutherford, contracting his brows, "and revert, reluctantly on my part, to what you were going to propose about Esdaile. How then is Esdaile to be connected with our complication?"

"By this simple link," returned Bellamy, with a curious and diplomatic smile. "Who but Esdaile gave you a cheque for ten pounds this very morning? Do you know I have an unaccountable curiosity to see that same cheque of Esdaile's; suppose you tender it for my nearer inspection."

Rutherford, with some reluctance, produced his pocket-book, and handed the required document across to Bellamy.

"Let us examine your capabilities, my friend," said Bellamy, narrowly perusing the slip. "Written on one of Messrs. Bolt and Bullion's printed cheque forms, as you should be. Good, so far. There is another thing about you which I like; you are payable to Rutherford or bearer, and not to Rutherford or order. Question the last: have you room, my friend, or have you not? I really begin to think you have with a slight squeeze. If so,

you are a cheque in all respects estimable, and we are in glorious luck to possess you."

"How?" stammered Rutherford, with rapid changes of colour and countenance. "I do not exactly comprehend. Have you done with my cheque?"

"Rutherford," insisted Bellamy, with a playful push at his friend, "you are a most refreshing humbug. To have done with your cheque, I must first have begun upon it. Still, if you prefer to assume ignorance, there is no reason why you should not shut both eyes, insert your head in the sand like a camel, merely leave me your cheque, and go your way back to the Blackwater counter rejoicing!"

"Hush!" said Rutherford, raising his hands, "suppose we were overheard. Speak lower, for Heaven's sake!"

"What is the matter?" demanded Bellamy sarcastically. "Why, we are grown as pale as a villain in an afterpiece."

"I thought I heard a noise."

"Rats, my friend."

"In the direction of this cupboard, Bellamy."

"Mops and brooms, and housemaid's buckets. Try it."

"It is closed from the inside."

"Of course it is," sneered Bellamy with an oath; "leave it alone, and don't fly off at a straw. You have the nerves of a spinster in want of exercise, nourished on green tea. Do sit down again, man, and don't fidget about."

Rutherford, thus invoked, again seated himself near Bellamy, on the divan. Haggard he seemed, and notably ill at ease; after a pause he demanded with an effort:

"Suppose I ignore your purpose, Bellamy, what then?"

"Everything then," responded Bellamy, with headlong vivacity. "Why the riddle is solved, and the Sphinx Michaelson is overthrown. Receive, if it consoles you, my earnest assurance, that, in this case, ignorance is better even than bliss, it is security. Hark'ee, Rutherford, receive my offer in a nutshell. I undertake to meet this joint bill of ours to-morrow. I guarantee that you shall never hear more of Michaelson and his dirty seven hundred

pounds again. Return to Blackwater to-night, if you've a mind. Leave all to me. Know nothing. But, of course, you confide this cheque to my keeping. You never enquire what I do with it. In fact you give me absolute and unquestioned discretion to use it as I please. You accept my terms?"

"That is all very fine," reasoned Rutherford, with flashing eyes; "but things will never go as smoothly as your sanguine temperament suggests. Suppose, for sake of argument, that hereafter there is some—what shall we say?—trouble, about this cheque, the whole blame will fall on my shoulders, in whose name it is drawn."

"Listen to me," persisted Bellamy, extending his hands in an explanatory and remonstrative attitude, "I at once close that loop-hole of your hesitation. State freely in this event, with my full concurrence, that this cheque reached and was transferred into the hands of myself, Christopher Bellamy, in part payment of a sporting debt."

"And you?"

“Shall say, that I, in turn, most imprudently handed it on to a man whom I had met for the first time in the ring on a race-course. To whom I was more foolish still in losing a wager of ten pounds with two sovereigns in my pocket. My friend demands this wager, and refuses to lose sight of me till it be produced. I must elect between ceding him my friend’s cheque, or enjoying his company back to town. I chose the former alternative. Now, supposing any—I adopt your term—trouble to arise, this man, who I happen to know, will actually present the cheque at the banker’s counter, is the person to be—shall we put it mildly?—blamed.”

“Can you lay your finger readily on such a man?” demanded Rutherford, in a tone of relief, drawing a long breath.

“With the greatest ease,” said Bellamy, with a nod.

“We will talk this over,” hesitated Rutherford, and these two young men left the billiard-room arm-in-arm.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHEQUE IS CASHED.

IT is high noon in Fleet Street ; and the swinging glass doors of Messrs. Bolt and Bullion, never seem to rest upon their hinges for a second. They who emerge elbow those who press in. The cheque-counter is crowded six deep. Those in the background are cheered by a refreshing sound of shovelled sovereigns in the front.

At this busy mercantile hour, patiently waiting her turn, is a corpulent elderly lady. Her plaid shawl and poke bonnet are respectable, almost to painfulness. Her umbrella is a reference to character in itself. Her eyes beam through her spec-

tacles with a benevolent and motherly expression. The short, crisp, gray ringlets which fringe her forehead, tempt one almost to quote poetry. She seems too mild and good to jostle in this temple of Mammon.

There are two clerks on duty at the cheque-counter,—one a grizzled financial veteran, with the build and jowl of a bulldog, by name Mr. Jubb, one a straggling youth with weak eyes and a shock of light hair, known as Mr. Homer. The elderly lady has preferred youth, and directed her impetus in the direction of the younger man. She is doubtless a mother herself, and Mr. Homer may remind her of her sixth now a fancy stationer.

Her turn comes at last. With a grave bow to Mr. Homer, she presents a cheque for seven hundred and ten pounds. This is drawn in favour of Basset Rutherford or bearer, and is duly signed, 'Harvey Esdaile.'

Mr. Homer received the cheque with a feeble smile, but seemed to falter on perusing its contents.

"Is that signature right, Mr. Jubb?" he

demanded, holding out the cheque in the direction of the elder clerk.

"Right as rain," returned Jubb, in a surly voice. If there was a thing which Mr. Jubb enjoyed, it was snubbing Mr. Homer, his subordinate.

"It's a large amount," apologized Mr. Homer, in a deferential whisper. "I thought there was no harm in asking, you know."

"You thought, indeed!" snarled Jubb, with anything but respectful emphasis; "that name has a good balance." And Mr. Jubb turned his back abruptly on his junior.

Homer, crestfallen and confused, stammered out to the elderly lady,—

"How will you take it, ma'am?"

"Gold," she replied with decision, and her venerable mouth seemed to water at that comfortable monosyllable.

"She wants it all in gold!" whispered Homer appealingly, behind the shoulders of the averted Jubb.

"Then pay her in gold, you idiot!" retorted Jubb, without altering his position.

The younger clerk was silenced, and complied.

The elderly lady, with a sureness of hand beyond her years, deftly swept the glittering heap into a black hand-bag, closed up her treasury with a snap, bowed once more gravely to the counter, leisurely quitted the bank, and disappeared among the throngs of Fleet Street.

Later in the same day, Mr. Michaelson, of the Battersea Fields Discount and Reversion Company, was in an exceedingly bad humour. His clerk, Lucas Raymond, had seldom seen him in a worse. This was saying a good deal. Several events had contributed to ruffle and sadden Mr. Michaelson. One, he had secured the services of a bailiff whom he had to fee and dismiss unused. Another, certain of his clients whom he believed totally impecunious, had disclosed resources in reserve beyond his knowledge. Mr. Michaelson took an artistic pleasure in his occupation. Any proof that he might have squeezed out more, quite spoilt the pleasure of an even unhopd-for repayment. This

was surely the feeling of a true and great artist.

That same evening, Basset Rutherford booked himself by coach, and returned, in due course, to Blackwater. He was cordially received by his uncle at the mill. The head of the firm expressed himself satisfied, that Basset was rapidly acquiring solid habits of business-like application. Hints were given, that should this progress continue, Basset might soon hope to emerge from his present subordinate position. Basset replied to his uncle in expressions of gratitude and with protestations of fidelity, and devoutly hoped to himself, that no untoward disclosure, during the next fortnight, might undeceive his worthy relative.

Although Basset Rutherford had incontinently fled back to Blackwater, Christopher Bellamy made no attempt to leave town. He showed himself frequently in places of public resort; he chattered and lounged about like a man without a care and without a sorrow. He finally decided upon a very hazardous step indeed, and called

upon Harvey Esdaile, at his chambers in Burlington Street. Harvey received his visitor with the most freezing civility. He had never relished Bellamy's manners, and now after Julius Bellamy's disclosure, he had to put some restraint upon himself to refrain from kicking Christopher Bellamy down stairs. It had, indeed, been very bitter for Esdaile to learn that a man so worthless as this should have been preferred to himself. And he suspected that Julia had been unfairly trapped by her good-looking cousin into an engagement which only the girl's sense of honour and obligation induced her to abide by. So he had to sit and make small-talk with this second-rate dandy, whose head he would have broken with the utmost pleasure.

During the conversation, Bellamy managed to discuss Rutherford and mentioned his recent return to Blackwater. With assumed candour, Bellamy owned himself greatly disappointed on more intimate acquaintance with his quondam friend. Rutherford, he darkly hinted, was a person deeply embarrassed, without pity and with-

out principle. Bellamy did not wish this to be repeated, but he happened to know, that, in several recent financial transactions, their mutual acquaintance, Rutherford, had shown himself capable of conduct questionable in the extreme. By dint of recurring to this point with much persistency, he managed to make Esdaile mention the cheque drawn in Rutherford's favour. Bellamy then insinuated ; that in dealing with embarrassed people, coin was preferable to paper as a vehicle of payment ; that he did not glance in Rutherford's direction by this allusion, since the Blackwater man left town with his pockets, for that moment, full of money ; that Rutherford, shortly before departure, had insisted on parading his plenty with a somewhat vulgar ostentation.

So Bellamy at length brought his visit to a termination, greatly to Esdaile's relief, and retired, whistling an operatic fragment ; he thence sauntered down Burlington Street with an easy step and a free conscience, in the direction of Kensington Gardens.



CHAPTER IX.

SAINT GOVOR'S WELL.*

DOES the heading of this chapter recall to the reader some mountain spring, masked with lady-fern, surmounted by a broken cross, in the far highlands? There the peasant girls dip in their pitchers, and the purple moorlands swell away beyond. The heath-cock crows, and the roe-deer darts back. The mavis sings, and the sheep-bells tinkle.

Not so fast, my friendly reader. I can certainly hear the thrushes and the sheep-

* This well is of more recent date than 1840; but the writer cannot resist adding this bit of local colouring to his narrative.

bells around me ; but, though you may not expect it, St. Govor's Well is in Kensington Gardens, and St. Govor seems to have been a Welshman, imported neck and crop by an enthusiastic ~~Chief Lord~~ Commissioner.

It is written ; and down comes my descriptive muse with a bathos from her flight of fancy. Not that Kensington Gardens are not very lovely. We who have seen Messina, Athens, the Campagna, the Alps, fearlessly repeat that these cockney gardens are exceedingly beautiful. May no sacrilegious Board of the future ever invade their sacred shades. That harbour of fair wild blue-bells in the centre of miles of brick and mortar, where we can gather the earth-nuts still that Caliban offered as his love-gifts to Miranda ; where the brambles come in bloom on July days, and the few last descendants of the little rose-petalled storksbill still linger on under the ewe-wood to the west. Let all who care for nature, and are cooped up by adverse fate in London, give thanks for Kensington Gardens.

Near the octagon pond, which people stand staring round, as if they had never

seen ducks before in their lives, a little to its south-west, under the trees, is St. Govor's Well. It is railed round, and you descend a few steps into it. I fancy you might drink the slightly mineral waters just as well here as at Ems or Wildbad ; only the imagination in such cases being everything, perhaps the experiment would not succeed. All lepers, from the time of Naaman, like to be given a good deal of trouble, and to come a long way for their ablutions. So, to suggest a bathe in the Serpentine, and a penny tumbler of St. Govor's chalybeate, would only outrage their feelings.

There, near the well, stands a little green summer-house ; and here Christopher knew perfectly that he would find his cousin and sweetheart, Julia Bellamy, awaiting his arrival. Since Julius Bellamy had closed his doors upon his nephew, the lovers were compelled to meet in the open air. The gardens were handy for Arabian Crescent, suited their purpose well enough, and naturally suggested themselves as a place of meeting. Certainly Julia deceived and disobeyed her father in keeping these as-

signations. But Julia was romantic; and the very fact of her cousin being forbidden the house enhanced his merits hugely in her eyes. Mr. Julius Bellamy had lacked practical foresight when he pronounced this edict of expulsion upon his nephew. In his extreme wish to forward Esdaile's suit, the father had taken the very course to set his daughter irretrievably against her Cropshire admirer. If he had forbidden Esdaile the house instead, he might have really helped matters. But, with the majority of young ladies, is not a lover who is shown tamely up by the footman less attractive, than a suitor whom she is compelled to meet under the roseate halo of secrecy? Even supposing she liked squire and cousin originally about the same; Esdaile, ushered in by her father, rich and irreproachable, suggested a love-making, just a trifle common-place. Christopher, outcast, embarrassed, and hanging about the gardens like a beggar, brought out into play all Julia's feelings of pity and disinterested affection.

But Mr. Julius Bellamy had acted ac-

according to his lights, and to this mistake of his in parental management of daughters as a class, we shall find that we mainly owe the present narrative, and hence arose to Julia a store of future tears.

The meetings of lovers may be said to resemble Sassoferrato's pictures. They are all very pretty, but they are all very much alike.

With this apology and exordium, we shall endeavour to narrate what manner of discourse Julia and Christopher Bellamy held, as they sat in the summer-house, whereby the haunted rill of the holy Govor trickled merrily at the lovers' feet. There was no one in sight but a policeman; and, as it is acknowledged, on all hands, that in such matters policemen do not count, one of Christopher's arms stole round his cousin's unresisting waist.

"Christopher," began Julia, after a few preliminary endearments were concluded, "I have such a secret to tell you, dear; only imagine——"

Her cousin here interposed a brief osculatory interruption.

"Harvey Esdaile has proposed to me," she resumed, as soon as her lips were free; "think of that, now!"

"I have thought of it as an absolute certainty for a long time back," said Christopher, bitterly, kicking away a pebble.

"And there was such a scene," narrated Julia, between a laugh and a cry, "when I thanked him kindly, and said I had rather not."

"You are a noble girl!" exclaimed Belamy, with another interruptive dash; "one in twenty thousand, to prefer a penniless cousin to the owner of Garwood Priory. Who made the scene?—not my rival, I presume."

"My father," explained she, with rather a scared look, even at her parent's mention, "came in afterwards, and said such dreadful things. Oh, Christopher, I do not know which way to turn; I am so frightened and utterly miserable."

"Frightened at your father's vehemence," interposed Christopher, contemptuously; "we could soon reduce him to reason, if that was all."

"Ah ! dearest," she continued, through her tears, "you can never know what pressure is put upon me to bring me to my father's views. I am terrified only for this, lest they should make me break my word and give you up."

"Does my uncle," cried Christopher, with a sinister look, "consider himself acting honourably in forcing his daughter's inclinations—in urging her to throw her promise to the winds?"

"O don't look so dreadful, Christopher," she entreated, clinging to his arm; "it is not that. My father sees; and, indeed, I also must allow, that Mr. Esdaile is good, excellent, generous, and all that a girl ought to expect——"

Christopher ground out an oath, and shook her off almost roughly.

"The infernal prig!" was his half-articulate rejoinder. "Spare me his praises. They are wormwood."

"But Mr. Esdaile *is* generous," repeated Julia, holding her ground with a very engaging persistence, despite her lover's black looks, "and I will tell you why."

"Get the story soon done," scowled Christopher, with a yawn, "I think I shall light a cigar."

"You are a cross old thing," resumed Julia, perhaps not altogether displeased at this exhibition of Christopher's jealousy, "but I mean to surprise you agreeably. Think; I had to tell Mr. Esdaile that I was engaged to a poor man, I mentioned no names, but meaning you—"

"That made the bumpkin stare!" observed Christopher, rancorously; "the revelation, that money does not always win the day will do him good."

"I will not have you so spiteful," interposed Julia, playfully slapping his arm. "Well, one thing led to another, and I told Mr. Esdaile that my intended was not only poor but in debt—"

"I must say," said Christopher, biting his lip, "that such a disclosure on your part, Miss Bellamy, was wholly uncalled for."

"Listen, you peevish child," cried Julia, pushing him with her parasol; "what does Mr. Esdaile do but asks to be allowed

to pay the debts of this unknown person !”

“The devil he does !” shouted Christopher, slapping his thigh. “By Heaven, I wish he had made this offer a week back !”

“You would not have accepted it surely, Christopher, dear ?” she interposed, with a distressed look.

“Why not ?” he ejaculated, shrugging his shoulders ; “if the fellow is flat enough to volunteer this—and—there don’t cry—Julia—I could have paid him back right enough after we were married.”

“I told him,” sobbed Julia, “that this unknown person was too sensitive to accept assistance.”

“Well, well,” consoled the lover, with a harsh laugh, “the harm is done now, but next time, Julia, speak for yourself.”

Julia looked bitterly disappointed at this speech.

“Why there it is !” exclaimed Christopher, petulantly, “had ever a fellow such ill-luck as I have ? I wanted you to elope with me last week—I had a certain—bill

—to—meet. Once married, your father must have paid it for me. You refused me point-blank. Talk of filial obedience. You *nearly* get me arrested by your shilly-shallying. To get myself out of this scrape, I have to plunge deeper into—the mire ; when, now it turns out, that there is a rich fool perfectly besotted about you, willing all the time to offer the necessary accommodation. And the queer thing is that—”

And here Christopher pulled up dead short.

Julia looked up anxiously, but he said no more.

“Let us change the subject,” Christopher suggested sulkily, after a pause, during which he had viciously lashed his cane against the wooden sides of the summer-house.

“So be it, dear,” said Julia, humbled and frightened at his recent outburst. “But I must tell you one more disagreeable thing, which my father said to me, to convince you how hard I am driven. He actually told me, that if ever there was a man who

would treat his wife well, it was Esdaile, and if ever there was one who would use her badly, it was—”

“Myself,” supplied Christopher, coolly. “The old gentleman is both sagacious and prophetic. Thank him from me for his good opinion. Well, Julia, suppose I have a worse temper than Esdaile—who has no temper, as his blood is snow-broth—suppose I shall scold you frequently when we are married, and this turnip-master will be equably calm in all household mischances ; what say then, Julia ?”

“That I love you, Christopher,” she beamed out upon him, drying her eyes ; “that I loved you first. That my love will survive many scoldings. That my promise is given and I will never break it.”

“You are a lass of the right metal,” commended Christopher, dismissing his irritation ; “I think you do love me, Julia, I mean, unselfishly love me.”

“Try me,” she urged quietly, drumming with her fingers on her sleeve ; “test me and try me, Christopher.”

"You would shrink," he returned despondently, hanging his head, "from the test which comes into my mind—a ready means of cutting the knot of all our troubles."

And he fixed his eyes full upon her face.

"Tell me, love," said Julia, beginning to tremble.

"Marry me next Friday, secretly," he said, in a hissing whisper at her ear. "There, the murder is out, old girl. You would not last week, and your delay nearly—ruined me. Refuse me again, and God only knows what entanglements await me!"

Julia shrank away, cowering, into a corner of the summer house, and broke into a passion of tears.

"O papa, papa," she cried, through a tumult of sobs, "you are driving me to this."

"You never spoke a truer word," struck in Christopher, who saw his advantage. "Let the fault—if blame there be—of this secrecy, rest upon your father. No one can say you had any other alternative."

"Let me try papa once more?" pleaded Julia, vehemently.

"So you shall," agreed Christopher, with an air of magnanimity.

"I will entreat him," sobbed Julia, pressing her lover's hand between her own, "once more to allow me to marry you, dear."

"And if he refuses," interposed Christopher, with a touch of disdain, "as, take my word for it, he will, then—"

"I will meet you on next Friday," faltered Julia, "I will meet you and—"

Here she burst into renewed lamentation.

"Become," concluded Christopher, with some genuine feeling and a dash of melodrama, "the most adored bride, that ever an injured lover won away from the plots and machinations of her selfish relatives."

And so it was agreed, and they went towards the Scotch firs homewards, arm in arm; loitering fondly and affectionately over every yard of the way.

And Christopher explained, how, supposing Mr. Julius Bellamy were to turn a

deaf ear to his daughter's final appeal, he, Christopher, would await Julia next Friday, extremely early, in the wooden summer-house, and escort her thence quietly in a cab to a little church in the very heart of the city. Christopher reiterated to Julia his solemn assurance, that this expedition was both justifiable and necessary to defeat the urgent and tyrannous pressure brought to bear by his uncle upon Julia. He told her, that this noble sacrifice of herself was imperatively called for at once. His own affairs grew daily blacker and blacker. She only could save him by placing, without delay, her fortune under his legitimate control. He represented to the romantic girl, that the reformation of a rake was one of the noblest missions that a woman could undertake. That with her he would become steady and devoted, without her a lost and desperate man.

After many such like specious common-places, appropriate to the occasion and his own need, he proceeded to embrace Julia tenderly, to the great interest of several adjoining nursery maids ; she turned away

west to Arabian Crescent. He, on hailing a hansom cab, supposed the fare to Doctors Commons to be half-a-crown. So Christopher rolled away in that direction, and Julia felt, she had done a very silly thing, but not a soul had she in the world whose advice at this crisis she could rely upon. Therefore, she did nothing, and made some slight preparations for the coming Friday in considerable trepidation.

Christopher had declaimed much against selfishness during the conclusion of their conversation, but it did not occur to Julia, that the raven sometimes had been known to object to a dark coat, and that certain young Romans, called the Gracchi, were very severe on popular *emeutes*.





CHAPTER X.

FAVOURS AND FETTERS.

THE Friday morning appointed in our previous chapter has arrived. The door of a mouldy little church near Finsbury Circus stands ajar. A few very small girls, carrying large ragged babies, stray inside the edifice. They quickly emerge and inform other dirty-faced children about to enter, that it really is not worth their while ; that a couple are being married, but that they have no friends to see them through the ceremony ; and, as for the bride, the plainness of her clothes is disgraceful ; and that they, these tattered little baby-nurses of eight, would not say thank you to be

married like that. Presently, the humming monotone of the clergyman within ceases.

A spotted-faced beadle comes out to air himself on the steps. He remarks to his wife, a slovenly woman scouring on her knees about half-way down, that the couple are signing now, and that she had better suspend her pail and brush operations till they have come out. The beadle says this languidly, but he evidently has no heart in the recent ceremony. He feels, as an ecclesiastical personage, that such people even as these must be married somewhere on public grounds. Let them come, therefore, by all means. They should receive tolerance at his hands ; what more could such folks expect, without even a hired glass-coach to mitigate the shabbiness of the whole proceeding ? Mr. Beadle continues to enjoy the air, and puts it hazily to himself, that the proletariat owes something to the powers and dignities that be. Mr. Beadle begins to feel quite resentful, that his feelings should have been wounded by a coachless marriage for the trifling economy of ten shillings. Mr. Beadle is almost

sorry that he commanded his wife to desist from her scouring.

In fact, these people are getting married with a whole catalogue of grievous omissions. Postboys, favours, cake, bridesmaids, groomsman, clerical assistants, old shoes, orange blossoms, lace flounces, champagne, one and all, shed no lustre and lend no sanction to this nuptial contract. Certainly, in one detail it surpasses many grander celebrations, the bride goes purely for love to the altar, but it is a very vulgar marriage for all that, and this trifling point in its favour is entirely merged by the terrible and vital deficiencies above recorded.

Presently, a tall young curate with large, ill-set joints, and a rusty black suit shambles out into the street. He is shouldering on a ready-made apology for a great coat, and is straightening the ends of his cravat. Mr. Beadle acknowledges him with cordial urbanity tempered by a tacit assertion of equality; were it the vicar, Mr. Beadle would be tenderly deferential. Mr. Beadle often assures his wife in their domestic privacy that he is unrivalled in beadledom

for the correct appreciation of who is who, and what is what.

Lastly, behold the newly-married ones themselves, arm in arm, Julia in a plain bonnet and travelling dress, Christopher in his ordinary morning attire. For all that, many a worse-looking couple have left a church-gate in the full glory of four horses and two postilions. They were absolutely alone, and departed as they came on foot.

Two ragged urchins accompanied them some paces of their way feebly cheering. Christopher told them to desist, and they instantly demanded a penny. These were the sole congratulations received by Julia and Christopher upon their nuptials. Possibly, the compliments of friends upon similar occasions in high life are often equally disinterested.

Left now to pursue their journey in peace and unnoticed, husband and wife reached, after a short walk, a small private hotel. Here Christopher had engaged a private sitting-room into which they were conducted. The husband, having ordered breakfast of a limp and drowsy waiter,

threw himself listlessly into an easy-chair, while Julia went upstairs to effect some necessary alteration in her dress.

At this moment an impatient ring came at the door-bell of the hotel; and Bellamy, looking down through a corner of the window-blind, perceived on the pavement Mr. Julius Bellamy, Esdaile, and a muscular-looking personage unknown.

Bellamy's first impulse was to bolt the sitting-room door, his second to rush downstairs, hide in the passage, and escape while the waiter led the intruders, as he was sure to do, upstairs. His third impulse and final resolution was to stay where he was, and brazen it out. To face his new father-in-law he had not the least objection, but the appearance of Esdaile and their unknown companion had really disconcerted him. Clearly something was wrong about the cheque. Still, married as he now was sure and fast to Julia, he might count on impunity through the unwilling offices of his uncle.

Besides, there was Julia upstairs; to escape with her was impossible, to abandon

her was impolitic. Esdaile, he reflected, might suspect him likely enough; but any absolute certainty of his guilt, he believed, could never be produced. He felt, moreover, confident that, in her present situation, Julia would condone any amount of suspicion short of actual certainty.

By the time the waiter had appeared, closely followed by the three intruders, Christopher Bellamy had sufficiently recovered himself to receive them with a cool and airy impertinence.

"Wish me joy, gentlemen," he began, volubly buoyant. "I certainly did not venture to invite either of you to my wedding breakfast, but you are come for all that."

"You are too great a scoundrel to be spoken to," scowled Mr. Julius Bellamy, growing very red in the face. "If my heart did not bleed for my poor deluded girl—What have you done with her?"

"My wife is upstairs," replied Bellamy, with a shrug. "No need to call her down, is there? At any rate, let us get through our preliminary amenities before I summon

her. A family quarrel, Mr. Esdaile ; pray excuse us."

"Your insolence," gasped Mr. Bellamy, drying his head with a pocket-handkerchief, "is only equalled by your criminality."

"Look you here, uncle and father-in-law," pursued Christopher, with a jaunty self-assurance ; "be reasonable, and put a good face upon what cannot now be mended. Accept accomplished facts. You shut your doors in my face, to prevent my marriage with your daughter. She and I are sincerely attached ; you left us no option save deceiving you ; you wished to sacrifice your daughter ; I claimed leave to intervene. I presume Mr. Esdaile has honoured me with this visit to convince me how gracefully he can wear a willow head-dress."

"I have come," retorted Esdaile, with his lip quivering at the taunt, "chiefly to see how clumsily you will wear a pair of hand-cuffs."

"Mr. Esdaile, this is too much !" shouted Christopher, visibly wincing through all the

bluster of his tone at the rejoinder. "This is a private room. I am bound to put up with the senile scurrilities of a relative. The slanders of an envious and disappointed rival are wholly another matter. There is the door. I have to be taught, that, even on my marriage-day, I am not to be free from the intrusion of a person calling himself a gentleman. There is the door, I repeat. The third time I shall say this with a policeman."

"Your wishes are anticipated," said Esdaile, nudging the elbow of their unknown companion; "we have secured one already. Officer, do your duty."

"Mr. Christopher Bellamy," said the officer, coming forward quietly, "it becomes my duty to arrest you on suspicion of having tampered with a cheque drawn by Mr. Esdaile. You are an active and resolute man; but a whistle from me through that window will bring help enough to settle matters with you very easily."

Christopher had taken an involuntary leap in the direction of Esdaile at the first mention of his arrest; but as the officer pro-


ceeded, he evidently changed his tactics, and merely said, with a ghastly effort at a smile—

“Gentlemen, you have evidently lost your wits. I know nothing whatever about this cheque.”

“It is right to caution you,” continued the officer, feeling in one pocket, “that all you say will be used against you on trial. It is fair to add, that, though I am in plain clothes, my assistants outside are in uniform. Therefore, I hope, for the sake of unnecessary scandal, you will not oblige me to introduce them into this hotel.”

“Gentlemen!” returned Christopher, breathing hard, “this is either a malicious mistake or an infamous conspiracy. My uncle’s vindictive hate is notorious. You are my disconcerted rival. Look to yourselves in either case when I am at large again. I shall offer no resistance now, and will readily accompany this officer—call down Julia.”

He concluded with an effort—almost with a gasp—and a stern darkness settled on his face.



The officer advanced stealthily to Christopher's side, with a pair of hand-cuffs.

"Stay!" cried Mr. Julius Bellamy; "pocket those things for the present, and wait outside. You can leave us also, Esdaile. Your presence will not help negotiation. Will you still act in this matter, as you promised me, while we came along?"

"My feeling towards your daughter," murmured Esdaile, deeply moved, "wholly over-powers my resentment at this ruffian's taunts. For her sake, I leave this matter completely in your hands."

"You are a noble fellow," whispered Mr. Bellamy, laying a faltering hand on Esdaile's shoulder. "God bless you for this forbearance. Now, go, and leave me to deal with this reprobate."

Esdaile and the officer retired. Christopher guessed that some compromise was about to be suggested, and his elastic temperament at once began to assert itself.

"You are my brother's son," commenced Mr. Bellamy, whom the words nearly choked, when the door had closed; "you are my miserable daughter's husband; on


these grounds only I condescend to treat with a felon——”

“Your proofs, Mr. Bellamy, your proofs,” said Christopher, with a flash of his old bullying self-assertion.

“Your chambers were searched yesterday. In your dispatch-box lay a nearly-new blotting-pad. When held to the looking-glass, it bore plain impressions of these words :—‘Seven hundred and, seven hundred and, seven hundred and !’”

Christopher’s hand tightened upon the arm of his chair as he listened, and a few cold drops burst out upon his forehead. His nostrils dilated a little ; but he neither spake nor moved otherwise.

“Strangest of all, these three words had left five perfect duplicates, and seven fragmentary ones on the whole surface of the blotting-pad ; and, mark this, in every instance, the words were, for no apparent reason, crowded together. But when measured, every separate repetition of the three words occupied exactly the same space, and corresponded precisely to the breadth of room left for the final forged interpolation



on Esdaile's cheque. Need I say any more?"

Christopher threw up his chin, and uttered a fearful imprecation. His hands were clenched so tightly, that the nails dented into the flesh of his palms. Had he been alone with Julius Bellamy at that instant, beyond all other human aid, what would the old merchant's life have been worth?

But now, with the police within earshot, Christopher came forward jauntily, and managed to make his father-in-law an unconcerned ironical bow, saying—

"Quite unnecessary. The game is up. What are your terms?"

"To leave this house and England for ever, without seeing Julia."

"Your alternative?"

"The felon's dock, and certain transportation."

"A man cannot live on air, even abroad," snarled Christopher, twisting his fingers into his pocket-handkerchief. "Be pleased to remember that, in marrying me without settlement, your daughter has re-

signed her whole fortune to my absolute control."

"Granted," interposed Mr. Bellamy, with an evident triumph overpowering his distress for the first time, "if Julia had any fortune; but providentially—most providentially—she has none!"

Christopher bit his lip, and started as if he had been shot.

"Come, Mr. Bellamy," he rejoined, angrily, after a moment's pause, "you are playing with me for your own purposes. Julia told me herself, that in her mother's right alone, she was entitled to twenty thousand pounds."

"Silly girl!" exclaimed Mr. Bellamy, with genuine compassion in his voice, "she might as well have casually told a burglar that she kept a thousand pounds in gold among her knitting-needles. O the simplicity of these women!"

"Never mind abuse; but is it so?" demanded Christopher, with impatience and insolent emphasis.

"Thank Heaven, it is not!" returned Mr. Bellamy, fervently raising his eyes.

“ Under our marriage settlement, my late wife brought in as her share twenty thousand pounds ; this was set aside as a provision for the children of the contemplated marriage. It seemed fair, and I had plenty of my own, without trenching upon her dowry. But while she lived, she and I together, and now she is gone, I alone, as survivor, have the power to say in what shares the children of our marriage shall enjoy this fund. True, my eldest married daughter died, and Julia is my only child now, poor thing. But my eldest daughter left one son, and for this purpose he stands in her shoes. Consequently, I intend to portion out and appoint my wife’s money thus, after the events of this morning. To Master Onslow Dosseter, a boy of ten, in Leicestershire, on whom I have never rested eyes, the sum of nineteen thousand, nine hundred, and ninety-nine pounds ; to Julia, wife of Christopher Bellamy, one pound. Do you follow me ?”

“ With damnable precision,” cried Christopher, becoming coarsely defiant. “ So much for expecting legal accuracy at the

lips of women. I freely own, I am foiled on all points. It's a mercy, that, for your credit you can't lock me up. Ha ! ha !"

"Will nothing check your effrontery?" replied the merchant, with a look of loathing at his nephew.

Christopher seated himself astride of a chair and began to whistle.

"Go on," he exclaimed roughly, after a pause, "I await your offers."

"I don't mean to drive you to desperation for all that," pursued Mr. Bellamy, turning away in disgust. "Accept my terms, and one hundred pounds shall be paid quarterly to your credit, at the chief bankers in any foreign town you choose to indicate."

"By no means a bad suggestion," applauded Christopher, with a harsh grating laugh. "I commend this most common sense arrangement. A felon, so you call me, consumes as many cubic inches of beef as a saint; perhaps more,—he certainly works harder."

"Then you agree?" said Julius, with a sigh of relief.

"Not yet, by any means," insisted Christopher, pertinaciously. "I don't like leaving Julia. Come, father-in-law, double my proposed income, and I will take her with me on my wanderings off your hands."

"She would never trust herself to a forger," spoke Julius, shuddering.

"Let her answer for herself, at any rate," sneered Christopher, brightening up, with his hand upon the bell.

"It is needless," interrupted Mr. Belamy; "I say to this emphatically, no! I would prosecute you sooner than consent to any such arrangement. Transportation would separate you two as effectually as this voluntary exile, which I propose. Do you suppose I would abandon my only child to your tender mercies? Why, you would beat her in a fortnight, and, who knows, but end in making her, through sheer terror at your displeasure, as criminal as yourself. The forger's wife must become the forger's accomplice, or woe be to her.—Your choice?"

"Are you resolute in offering me a

lonely journey or a policeman?" threw in Christopher, moodily.

"I am most resolute," panted Mr. Bellamy.

"Confound it," mused Bellamy to himself, during a pause that ensued; "I sha'n't go alone for all that, you old mercantile curmudgeon. I wonder, if Lily Roundabout would be tempted out as far as Florence after me. With my artistic tastes, Florence will serve my turn well enough for a year or so, till all this hubbub has blown over."

"I wait your answer," reminded Mr. Bellamy impatiently.

"Then I sacrifice my affections to avoid a family exposure, and depart. There is one little additional matter,—I presume we may burn this same blotting-pad before I go. I own I should feel relieved to witness its speedy incrimination."

"We are not so simple as that," argued Mr. Bellamy, sternly. "As long as we retain these proofs, you dare not transgress our compact of to-day by one inch. We keep this blotting-pad as a hostage of your

good behaviour. With it your conviction is easy five years hence—ten years hence. You are not dealing with absolute simpletons."

"And I am to hold my freedom at the beck and pleasure of this prig, Esdaile!" fumed Christopher, pacing the apartment in displeasure.

"I cannot expect a man of your mental fibre ever to do Esdaile justice," explained Mr. Bellamy, seriously. "I am convinced, however, that he would as soon prosecute the husband of a to girl whom he was once sincerely attached, as—shall we say, forge—?"

"It is easy," insinuated Christopher with a sneer, "for this Cropshire cow-feeder to be virtuous on many thousands a year."

"But you would be a rascal if you were a Rothschild!" rejoined his uncle, with some malice.

"But suppose we strike hands on this bargain," grumbled Bellamy, giving way rapidly. "I must see Julia alone for an hour to say farewell."

"Not for ten minutes," insisted the mer-

chant warmly. "I fear your influence just at present only too much. It is more merciful to her, that there should be no leave-taking. I shall, when you are gone, mitigate the first shock by making her believe that this is no final separation. That your misdeed rendered instant flight imperative. I shall alleviate her misery by holding out hopes that, in a few months, when the scandal of your late proceeding has somewhat evaporated, she may, if so minded, see you again. That she will never be so minded, I firmly and fondly anticipate,—indeed, I am almost fully convinced,—if I can only gain for her, now, some few months for reflection."

"Agreed," said Christopher, huskily, with an effort. "It is no great sacrifice to be spared telling a girl who loves you, face to face, to what depths this miserable and imperious need of cash has driven me. I am to march away, then?—To be dismissed like a pestilence,—to go out sneaking like a dog?"

"Stay," said Julius Bellamy, "tell me one thing before you go. It may clear

honest men, and Messrs. Bolt and Bullion's clerks are in dire tribulation just now. Who cashed this cheque for you?"

Christopher burst into a peal of merriment.

"You won't take any measures, of course," he premised at last, "against the person I indicate."

"Nothing is further from my wish," explained the merchant; "to let the captain of the gang go, and to hang the rank and file thief would be scanty justice."

"It was cashed," whispered Christopher, with twinkling eyes, "by a deuced nice girl, with no nonsense about her, at one of the theatres; a clever wench enough at making herself up into any character, and with a special turn for the *rôle* of respectable motherly old ladies. I was waiting outside in a hansom cab. She did it admirably for the mere lark."

"That is sufficient,—go now," added Mr. Bellamy.

And Christopher moved towards the door.

"One moment," interposed, once more,

Mr. Bellamy, and then proceeded to call through the open door, "Mr. Inspector, will you step up stairs?"

"Do you intend to break faith after all this parley?" exclaimed Christopher, grown suddenly pale.

"By no means," assured his uncle, as the inspector reappeared; "a few final instructions to this officer."

"Make them brief," hissed Christopher, under his breath, "or Julia will be down and disconcert you yet—"

"Mr. Inspector," began Julius Bellamy, "you are to see this person down to Dover."

The officer bowed.

"Mr. Esdaile is gone home?"

"A quarter of an hour since."

"Good! You are to make certain that my nephew embarks thence for the Continent. This done, your duty as regards him terminates. Here is a fifty pound note. Book him at Charing Cross to Paris, take yourself a return to Dover, hand him what remains on the steps of the Dover packet. Is all clear?"

"My instructions are most explicit," returned the inspector, inclining again his head. "I am at your service, Mr. Christopher Bellamy."

At this moment Julia entered the room.

She uttered an exclamation of dismay and wild surprise on perceiving her father and an unknown gentleman, whom she supposed at once to be Mr. Bellamy's solicitor, brought thither to interpose every legal impediment to their runaway match.

"Remember our terms," whispered Julius hurriedly to his nephew, "get away at all hazards; quiet her with any pretext; leave the rest to me—"

"My dearest father," stammered Julia, rushing forward, "on my bended knees I ask your pardon for my most undutiful conduct."

"I have no anger, darling," said the father, raising her in his arms, "only pity, only pity."

"Julia," said Christopher, gravely, taking her hand, "we have acted rashly this morning, and I must leave you for a time to transact some urgent business with this

gentleman—relative to our runaway match. I have omitted some legal formalities, which, if not rectified at once, might hereafter raise questions upon the legality of our nuptial contract. In case, only in case, my love, I should be detained, give me one kiss, dearest, before I go.”

Christopher folded his wife for one moment in a fervent embrace, and then hurriedly left the apartment, accompanied by the officer.

“The only consolation,” mused Christopher to himself, as he followed the officer from the room, “is, that if I’ve been found out in one thing, I have plenty more behind that will never come to light. I’ve married Julia, and now I shall give other earlier complications the slip. My worthy uncle, who turns up his eyes at my peccadillo of to-day, would quite lose his breath could he know my whole biography. Suppose, only, that he could have seen me very late last night prowling about the Old Church, Chelsea ; what a countenance of dismay he would have called up ! Hang it, if my errand there had been known, it would

have been all the better for Julia, my disconsolate grass-widow, that is to be! And then Esdaile, the grower of turnips, might have taken the last trick after all."

And, as Christopher made these reflections, the door of the room closed upon the reprobate and the policeman, and the door of this history shuts also upon the forger for twenty years.

"What a day of surprises this has been," said Julia to her father, with a dazed expression in her eyes. "What can it all mean? I shall give up trying to understand, I think. My chief joy, father, is that you are kind, and not angry. But you seem strange and absent like the rest. You shake your head! Well, I will be patient till Christopher returns. Will it be ten minutes or an hour? On one's wedding day one cannot bear to be left alone."

"How shall I ever break it to her?" pondered Julius Bellamy, with a piteous look.

"Breakfast is served," said the drowsy waiter, appearing at the door. And this was Julia's wedding feast.




CHAPTER XI.

THE RAYMOND INHERITANCE.

RATHER more than two weeks after Lucas's visit to her bedside, the malady of Mrs. George Raymond had terminated fatally, and her brother-in-law had been called upon to defray nearly all the expenses of her obsequies.

Mr. MacSion had been ready, both in and out of season, with advice and suggestions, but he turned a deaf ear to all hints from Lucas, that he or his flock should contribute their quota of the undertaker's account. Then, for the last week or more of Mrs. George's existence, it became necessary to hire a nurse; Mrs.



Matthew's presence being imperatively required to escort one of the daughters of her late husband's patron, the Blackwater brewer, to Mentone ; a commission, which her great obligations to the family, no less than her own straitened circumstances, urged her to accept.

Therefore, when on the afternoon of the funeral, Lucas had added up his disbursements, on the landlady's bill, the doctor's reckoning, the undertaker's account, the cemetery fees, and the nurse's wages, he found his purse grievously lightened, and his savings of the last few months scattered to the winds.

Then a furniture broker arrived, and cleared out into a long green van, with much celerity, the entire goods and chattels of the late Mrs. George, having contracted to relieve Lucas of the same in a lump, without further personal trouble ; and, moreover, to pay into Lucas's hands for this "speculative" lot, as the broker termed it, the sum of three pounds and fifteen shillings. This was the amount of Mrs. George Raymond's assets ! This

speculative broker having driven away, leaving nothing behind him but desolation, bare boards, dust, and hay, the landlady re-entered upon her possession of the apartment with a pail and a long broom. With her Lucas terminated relations by manual delivery of the room-key, and, giving one hand to his infant nephew Ralph, and bearing in the other a very slender bundle, containing Ralph's entire wardrobe, the pair bent their steps towards pastures new, in the direction of Brompton.

The pavement was wet and soapy. The rain and the fog were contending for atmospheric ascendancy, so they compromised the matter by a drizzle, which partook of the qualities and excellences of both. After a hundred yards, Mrs. George's ricketty son refused to walk an inch further. Indeed, it was no easy matter even for an adult to avoid slipping for many steps consecutively. So Lucas, with a philosophic shrug, was fain to carry both his nephew and his nephew's bundle. This rendered his locomotive progress by no means easy, and when the child began

to wail, the situation was in no respect improved.

So Lucas almost skated along, with many inward repinings at this dire burden of a child with which it had pleased fate to saddle him. Its present care, he thought, was anxiety enough ; but he had even gloomier apprehensions, that, when age had developed his mischievous propensities, this boy would be a still more formidable responsibility. A plodding, dogged, methodical fellow, of solitary clock-work ways, and confirmed bachelor habits, it is easy to conceive, that this trust, light enough to a family man, assumed in the mind of Lucas the dimensions of an absolute calamity. A feeling of intense hatred, towards the unoffending cause of his embarrassment, replaced his general despondency ; and, we confess with regret, that Lucas derived a ray of light from the rather brutal reflection that a child so puny and abnormal was never likely to reach the years of maturity.

In this unpleasant frame of mind, Lucas thankfully hailed, on the horizon of thoroughfares, the sooty projecting corner of the

Queen's Elm ; to which Barossa Place lay handy. Here Master Ralph was confided, still howling, to the care of Mrs. Armitage. Here we will leave the child for the present, in the guardianship of the landlady.

Thence, Lucas put his best foot forwards to report himself at the office of Mr. Samuel Michaelson. Inasmuch as the sickness and funeral of his sister-in-law had thrown the professional work of the usurer's clerk into formidable arrear ; added to which, Lucas had assured Michaelson on the previous day, that by four o'clock in the afternoon, he would be available at the money-lender's premises.

It now wanted barely ten minutes to the time appointed, when Lucas gained the corner of Sloane Street.

"Well, by heaven," thought Lucas, in mutinous comment on his present embarrassed situation, "so this is coming up to London to get on ! I call it verily getting back. Thirty pounds of savings are melted away in decently putting under ground my brother's widow. Why should I pay her rent, or fee this dead woman's doctor ?

Because I have been a weak compliant idiot. Bad enough this but worse remains. This legacy of a hungry, fractious, staring child to hamper my hands and drag at my heels. Hard lines, with a vengeance, upon a striving man! If I could only get a start, and wash my hands of this usurer, whose drudge and property I am. There is the hitch—capital; the want of this reduces me to stagnation. One small lump sum—say, a hundred pounds, actually in hard cash—I would nearly chop off my right hand to get it! Think of that. Only, perhaps, the price of one of this gentleman's high-stepping greys, who is doing his best to drive over me at this crossing!"

And Lucas, now nearly abreast of Albert Gate, regarded fixedly, and with no amiable aspect, the proprietor of the aggressive equipage.

Lucas was surprised to find that this gentleman returned his glance with obvious curiosity; and, after a movement of hesitation, during which he followed Lucas with his eyes, this person proceeded to pull up short under the French Embassy, and,

turning his head, beckoned Lucas to approach the side of the carriage.

"What does this portend?" muttered Lucas, utterly perplexed by conduct so unaccountable. "Am I to be scolded for looking at your horses with envy? Humph, a cat may look at a king. Pshaw! It can't be that. Perhaps his harness is wrong, and that groom behind is too lazy to get down. Let me see what he wants."

The gentleman leant forward, and demanded of Lucas as soon as he was within earshot—

"Is not your name Raymond?"

"I can't deny it, sir," returned Lucas.

"I thought so," nodded the other. "You Raymonds seem all turned on one lathe—you have each something quite Napoleonic about you. Jump up. I have tidings to communicate. I am due now at Roehampton, but if you don't object to the direction, I can talk to you on my way. Jump in; there is nothing to be shy about."

"You see, sir," remonstrated Lucas, with a vigorous attempt to dust his own coat-sleeve and furtively polish his hat, "that I

am hardly the kind of character to be seen driving about with a gentleman like you."

"Fiddle !" said the unknown, "I'm Esdaile of Garwood ; I have egotistically rushed upon the conclusion that, because I knew you, therefore you must know me. I forgot that I was off my own provincial dung-hill here."

"But, Mr. Esdaile——" protested Lucas, with deferential surprise and manifest reluctance.

"There, say no more about it," interposed Esdaile, pleasantly, "but get in. I should consider myself a snob indeed, if I was ashamed to be seen in public with any decent Garwood man. Look sharp. Are you right now ? Let go their heads, James."

So Lucas, to his great surprise, found himself returning to Brompton behind two spirited greys, at the rate of thirteen miles an hour.

Esdaile began at once, in an easy, unaffected way, which greatly reassured his companion—

"You are, of course, that son of old

Raymond who is something legal in London?"

"The exact personage, sir," admitted Lucas, putting a good face upon it, "though I fear the humblest of legal outsiders, and not exactly legal at this moment; though, before my present situation, I have been for years in an attorney's office, and that's my proper trade, and I was a fool ever to leave it."

"I see," pursued Esdaile, touching Lucas on the sleeve, "that you have already got into your black clothes; though how they have managed to find you passes my comprehension. I only arrived last night from Cropshire, and my butler told me the last thing, that there was not a clue to you then."

"This," explained Lucas, with a puzzled face, and vague thrill of apprehension, "is worn for my brother's widow, sir."

"Then it is as I supposed," pursued Esdaile, lowering his voice to a tone of constraint; "I do not wish—hem—to put this to you so suddenly, but—hem—your mother died last Wednesday."

"My mother dead!" echoed Lucas, with a nervous twitching of his under-lip; "dead! without a word, without a warning!"

"Don't trouble yourself to speak just yet," suggested Esdaile, considerably looking aside at the shops. "I have had trouble enough of my own lately. No man need mind being moved before me. Don't keep your sorrow in because of my presence."

And the rich young squire thought of Julia Bellamy, pining, desolate, for many years to come, linked to this forger, a widowed wife, and Esdaile thought his own fate very hard to bear.

"Mr. Esdaile," said Lucas, after a pause, in a broken voice, "I take it very kindly of you to have put yourself out to tell me this."

"By no means," denied Esdaile, in his comfortable, careless way; "a'mere neighbourly act, not worthy of acknowledgment."

"Some one might surely have written," returned Lucas, with a sudden darkening of his face. "I wonder who was about her at the last?"

"Let me explain," said Esdaile, with an incipient constraint in the telling. "I presume to begin with, that you had not seen your mother for years?"

"That is a true bill against me," allowed Lucas, with a sigh; "one regrets these omissions of duty always too late."

"Your mother," narrated Esdaile, absently, flicking his whip, "seems, by all accounts, to have become very eccentric latterly. No one was seen by her, no one was trusted."

"A family failing!" commented Lucas, shaking his head.

"One servant," pursued Esdaile, with a steady glance—"a mere girl of twelve—did the housework, and cooked, when such a process took place at all; for Mrs. Raymond was—excuse me—miserly."

"I am anxious," said Lucas, changing colour, "to hear exactly the position of affairs. Neither spare me anything, sir, nor extenuate any detail."

"You lighten my task," went on Esdaile, losing his hesitation. "Well, Mrs. Raymond had devised a most complicated

system of lock and key, to remove from this one small handmaiden the sugar, the coal; in fact every species of household store. So, at Mrs. Raymond's rather sudden demise—for she called in no doctor—not a scrap of paper could be found in the house, either declaring her wishes, or accounting for her kith or kin."

"Well, well," murmured Lucas, with a groan, blowing his nose, "poor soul, what an ending!"

"The only neighbour," resumed Esdaile, gathering up his reins, "with whom Mrs. Raymond was on terms—these relations being rather an armed neutrality than actual friendliness—believed that of the widow's three sons, two were dead, and one was a lawyer, as she put it, 'London way.' They came to me, as the nearest magistrate. I advanced the necessary funds for the interment, and recommended that you should be advertised for. This chance encounter of ours makes that superfluous."

"My dear sir!" exclaimed Lucas, with fervour and emphasis, "how can I express my gratitude for your generous conduct?"

"Not at all," disclaimed Esdaile, with a protesting hand; "I ran no risk. The loan was a safe one. The furniture would have paid me, let alone the land."

"The land?" echoed Lucas, absently. "Ay, the land, to be sure!"

"Ay, my good fellow," reminded Esdaile, in a matter-of-fact way, "your land now."

"Mine?" gasped Lucas, with a momentary flush.

"Whose else?" cried Esdaile, gaily; "and don't think me abrupt, if I add that you are welcome to two hundred pounds for each one of your four acres, whenever you have a mind to sell."

Lucas leant forward to reply, but his voice seemed harsh and husky, and his heart was beating fiercely in his ears. He moistened his dry lips once or twice with his tongue before he regained his normal power of articulation.

"You do not relish my offer?" surmised Esdaile, noticing only his companion's silence.

"Indeed I do," stammered Lucas, with fervour; "but—I—need—time—to decide——"

"Bless the man," ejaculated Esdaile, with a peal of laughter; "you never dreamt that I required your ultimatum on the nail?"

"N-no," spoke Lucas, feebly, "of course not."

"I need scarcely ask you whether the land is yours," threw in Esdaile, with careless fatality.

"The—land—is—mine."

Lucas had said it—only four words—each pronounced with slow and dogged resolution. The crisis had taken this man unprepared. The temptation came before he could reason about it. That one instant of half intuitive resolution would colour this man's days till the grave closed over him. That short sentence had thrown an abyss behind him, which could never be repassed. What slight contingencies settle our fates. Had Esdaile asked the same question before, instead of after, his blunt offer of eight hundred pounds, Lucas would

probably have replied, "the land is my nephew's!"

"Of course, the land is yours," repeated Esdaile, carelessly, "for the very cogent reason, that, till I lit upon you, these acres bade fair to be without an owner."

"Like a dog," threw in Lucas, with a forced attempt at being facetious, and shaking himself as if he were only partially awake.

"Or a foundling," added Esdaile, consulting his watch; "but remember you give me the refusal."

"My word upon that, sir," said Lucas, with homely earnestness, having somewhat regained his composure.

"I hate," insisted Esdaile, waving it off with his disengaged arm, "any beating about the bush. Frankly, I want this plot of yours grievously. It lies so in and in with my estate. It is greatly my interest to keep it out of bad hands."

"You will not find me hard to deal with," replied Lucas, promptly.

"Why," reasoned Esdaile, emphasising the contingencies with his whip, "a sporting

owner might tice away the pheasants from my best preserves, or a building owner might run up an avenue of mean cottages, which would be a perfect eye-sore to my approach. In short, when you choose to sell, these pounds are yours, and my fervent thanks into the bargain."

Lucas's eyes glistened. The anticipation of prosperity seemed already to have altered the downcast bearing of the man. His very clothes looked less shabby.

"And a bargain it nearly is," responded Lucas, with sudden cheerfulness, "provided, of course, I don't find a better market, which I shall not."

"Then," concluded Esdaile, extending his hand, "our talk is at an end, and you are over-run with business. I have told you some ill-tidings, and made you a good offer as a counter-weight. Let me now suggest that, as we are passing a telegraph-office, you should descend and work the wires to Garwood. Say you are found, send your address, and follow your message in person by the earliest train."

"That," mused Lucas, rubbing his head

to reflect, "can hardly be until to-morrow evening ;—my employer——"

Here Esdaile stopped his carriage, and Lucas got out.

"Good day, Mr. Esdaile," bowed Lucas from the pavement ; "I may some day, who knows, be able to repay your kindness."

The phaeton and the greys disappeared in the direction of Fulham.

Lucas remained on the pavement like a man in a dream. He touched himself first on the chest, and then on the elbow, as though to convince himself that he was waking and in the streets of London. He next pressed his forehead, and rubbed his eyes, and ultimately sat down upon the open-air bench of a carter's house of call.

"Lucas Raymond," said he to himself, with a slight shudder, "you are in for it now. I never believed you were going to turn out so great a—rascal."



CHAPTER XII.

MASTER AND WARD.

HUCAS entered Samuel Michaelson's office two full hours late. His drive with Esdaile had thrown him thus far behind his appointed time.

The money-lender sat at his desk, not at first sight a formidable personage at all. A short, lean old man, with long white hair, deep-set eyes, and a Jewish nose, and full curving lips.

"Very fine, indeed, Mr. Raymond," began his employer, quietly savage; "do you happen to possess a watch?"

"I could not," said Raymond, "possibly arrive sooner."

"This comes," observed Michaelson, in a stage aside, "of letting out idle clerks to jig about at funerals and other amusements."

"It wasn't the funeral," muttered Lucas, gruffly, raising both his arms to adjust his great coat upon a row of office pegs; "it wasn't the funeral, but a friend of mine, who detained me."

"Then," suggested the old man, derisively, chewing the feather of his pen, "have you been seeing the Judy shows home, or playing leap-frog in the streets?"

Lucas smothered an oath, and began to write away very vigorously at a small table of his own.

"Take my word for it," nodded his master, with vicious pleasantry, "that you gad about to no more burials while you're in my employment."

"Suppose," interrupted Lucas, with a steady glance at the Jew, "I meant to attend another obsequy to-morrow?"

"*You* mean," retorted Michaelson, furiously; "the question is what *I* mean. I have bought your time, and you budge no

more for a whole Kensal Green of interments, my good man!"

"And if my mother were dead?" instanced Lucas, quietly sanding a wet sheet of figures.

"You must bury her out of office hours," rejoined his master, without a shade of hesitation; "out of office hours, that is positive."

"She *is* dead," blurted out Lucas, with a certain triumph.

"Then really, Raymond," quavered the old Jew, in an extremity of petulance, "I can't go on paying a clerk whose relations choose to die one after another, at the very busiest time of year in the loan trade. I have overlooked it once, on the distinct understanding, that this kind of thing was not to occur again. I am thunder-struck at your audacity! and now, if I rightly understand you, you apply for leave to-morrow, when I have my hands full of fifty serious matters."

And old Samuel Michaelson ruffled his venerable hair, and bit his patriarchal lips in an actual frenzy of vexation.

"Mr. Michaelson, I must have leave," returned Lucas.

"You idle hound!" shouted the master, menacing his clerk with his closed hand; "you shall have leave for good on this day month; do you hear that?"

"I go gladly enough," replied Lucas, with a shrug.

"You will starve sorrowfully enough," foamed Michaelson, rigid with anger, "for I will give you no reference. You shall scrape roads and bring down your proud stomach on workhouse diet. Funerals, indeed!"

"Any future employment," answered Lucas, with boastful acerbity, "is no object to a man in my present improved position. I have come into a tidy lump of money."

"The murder is out!" snarled Michaelson, his temper contending with his surprise; "my beggar has mounted on horseback. It's time this office is clear of him."

"It will be in one moment!" cried Lucas, rising hastily. "There, take your bonds

and bills ;" (throwing a confused heap on Michaelson's desk). " Not a line more will I ever pen in this infernal dog-hole. I have put up long enough with your lunatic humours. Here's my coat and here's my hat, and I take the liberty of slamming your own office door in your face, and of finding myself a free man again. Send my wages after me, or I will put you in the county court. Send me an order for them, do you hear, old skin-flint !"

" I will have the law of you," piped the old man, in a shrill treble, after his retreating clerk. " I know, you rascal, how you are in league with that begging barmaid of a niece of mine, who spends more upon her back than would keep me for a month of Sabbaths. I have seen all your goings on together, though I have deemed it politic to keep my tongue between my teeth. You can't hood-wink old Samuel Michaelson. No, no, my fine fellow."

Lucas turned suddenly in his retreat, and once more confronted his late master.

"Your niece is a pearl, you are an old swinish usurer."

And with this word Lucas rushed out of the office.

He thence burst out into the street in a very heated condition indeed. For the first half mile he strode along at a furious pace, hardly knowing where he went, with his hat-brim crushed down upon his eyes. Many of those whom he met turned and regarded him with astonishment. By degrees, the very vehemence of his physical exertion neutralized the cloud of anger which tortured the man within. His pace slackened, and he became enabled to reflect upon the recent quarrel with his employer.

He began to experience, though his resentment still ran high, a reaction of relief at having shaken off Michaelson at any cost. To have done with so degraded a specimen of humanity, was a matter for exultation, though he still smarted under the valedictory insults of the money-lender. How events had thronged in upon Lucas during this one day.

He began to fancy himself a blind in-

strument in the hands of an overwhelming destiny. A mere puppet without choice or volition. Another link had been forged in the chain of necessity. He had thrown up his only means of livelihood, upon the strength of an inheritance which was not rightly his own. New employment he would not get. In any case, a reference to his last employer would be necessary, and he knew Michaelson would fulfil to the letter his threat of speaking against him when opportunity arose.

He must now *borrow* his nephew's money or starve. He palliated the matter to himself, that this transaction might pass muster on the footing of any other ordinary loan between man and man. He knew that this child could not legally sell his small property for nineteen years. He felt convinced that so handsome an offer as Esdaile's for the land would never recur again. The price was clearly a fancy one, and he was bound, in the interest of his family, not to let this offer drop through. If his nephew were produced, no legal sale could be effected

during his minority. If that nephew were kept judiciously in the background, Lucas could himself sell to the squire, as the ostensible owner ; and hereafter refund his nephew, if that nephew ever attained to years of discretion, an event which Lucas believed would never occur."

"Yes," continued Lucas to himself, now tolerably cool, and in full retreat towards Barossa Place, "the present *use* of this money must be mine. During those years, which a legal technicality would keep this sum useless and idle, I feel within myself the power to become a prosperous man, by using it as capital. My nephew shall lend it to me. Eight hundred pounds ! I will try Harriet Behrends again, who knows, but she might accept me now with this lump of money at my disposal ! The thought of that is very sweet indeed. I have every right to this loan in so many aspects. Some repayment I can claim. I half supported this child's mother, wholly paid her funeral expenses, and intended, had not this fallen in, to have gratuitously supported that same nephew himself,

through the troublesome and perilous period of childhood. So far I am resolved; but now the toughest knot of my difficulty meets me. What on earth am I to do in the interim with this child? Suppose I begin life again at Garwood as an attorney—which is my proper line and the profession for which I am qualified—as at the first blush of the thing, I now feel decidedly tempted to do; I clearly can never venture to take this child down to my native village. So in London must the infant be bestowed, since, thanks to the late Mrs. George's vitriolic disposition, and the morbid reserve of my poor mother's last days, I doubt if three persons at Garwood even suspect that my elder brother married. Another point in favour of my keeping this secret is, that all my mother's letters, papers, and effects need meet no eye but mine. And if, among this lumber, Mrs. George's begging letters be preserved, containing, as is likely, allusions to this child Ralph, I need hardly say, I shall not read the correspondence aloud at the market-cross. The worthy Mr. MacSion is too

much afraid of having to contribute his quota towards Mrs. George's debts to occupy himself with her affairs just now. Suppose I farmed out the child to Mrs. Armitage. No ; that would be dangerous. How, then, is this domestic problem to be decided ? No light at present. Here is Barossa Place—and as yet I pace helpless the mazes of this labyrinth.”

Lucas let himself in by a latch-key to his temporary residence. The entrance-passage was already pitch-dark, and he had to grope his way blindly along the walls towards the staircase. Mrs. Armitage was very chary of her gas—a lodger's head seemed to her an item of less account than the company's quarterly application.

“Hullo,” he called, bringing his shin in contact with some substance of unpleasant hardness, which proved the edge of a latent coal-scuttle. “Show a light, please, Mrs. Armitage. Where are you ? In the kitchen ?”

Mrs. Armitage in a distant and cavernous voice, confessed that she was, and suggested that Lucas should come down.

"I shall arrive in due time," muttered Lucas, with ironical composure, "unless I dislocate my neck in the descent or beat my brains out."

"I would show a light," said she, "but I can't well leave the child by himself."

The kitchen reached in safety, Lucas found his landlady engaged in feeding his infant nephew with pap-meat in a tremendous spoon. Master Ralph seemed to protest against this process of involuntary nutrition by a feeble, but continuous wail. The sound was anything but cheering.

Mrs. Armitage was one of those women who seem to carry a history in their face. She was plainly, even shabbily dressed, not much better than the wife of a working man would be attired. She wore a hideous frilled cap, such as no woman would tolerate for an instant on her head, who cared to make herself the least attractive. Hannah Armitage had a beautiful face, but an exceedingly pale one. An expression conveying the idea of suffering that was past and pain that continued. Her eyes were strangely vacant and colourless—as if

their original tint had faded out. Her manner was singularly impassive ; and, of all women in the world, Hannah Armitage thought the least about her personal appearance. In fine, she would have made an excellent model to any artist for a Christian martyr, but to the mass of men she would have seemed utterly unattractive and even repellent.

"Well," commenced Lucas, in a cheerful voice, "and how are we getting on?"

"It is a sullen child enough," returned Hannah, with a weary sigh.

"Ay, ay," said Lucas, "its mother was a peevish one before it."

"Is it your nephew?" demanded Hannah, listlessly glancing up.

"Cousin," returned Lucas, with a cough behind his hand.

"You said nephew," she hazarded.

"You heard me wrong," Lucas maintained.

"My memory is not good," she conceded, pressing her hand to her forehead.

"At all events," said Lucas, avoiding her eyes by glancing down upon his boots,

“Master Fractious will not remain upon your hands long.”

“I thought you meant to keep him,” rejoined Hannah.

“I have changed my mind,” was his explanation.

“Workhouse,” suggested Hannah, laconically.

“His friends,” corrected Lucas, with vagueness and hesitation, “have come forward. I did not expect they would, but, to my surprise, they have done so.”

“Oh that, indeed !” said Hannah ; “poor folks, I reckon ?”

“So, so ; anyway he will be called for to-morrow,” explained Lucas, with a momentary flush, moving his chair out of the glare of the fire-light, and shivering though he did not move beyond the reach of the heat.

“I will have his little bundle ready,” murmured Hannah, rocking the boy in her arms. “Poor child, poor child !”

“I have heard news since I went out,” resumed Lucas, with an effort ; “ill tidings find always messengers : a man I had never seen tells me my mother is dead.”

"You were not with her then?" she asked, with more earnest inflection in her voice than usual.

"I did not even know she was ailing," said Lucas, sternly.

"Neither was I with my mother when she died," remarked Hannah, with a slight tremor of the lips.

"The first occasion," thought Lucas, "I ever heard this woman allude to her family affairs."

"Well, well," he added, soothingly, "no one can help these absences."

"Some one could have helped mine," she insisted, with a darkening of the face.

"Some family discord?" consoled Lucas, at a venture.

Mrs. Armitage seemed unwilling to pursue the subject any further, and said it did not matter.

"Do you know," she said, after a pause, and her eyes brightened as she said it, "that, as I nurse this poor orphan, I seem to dose away, and fancy it my own lost child?"

"Died young," hazarded Lucas, "not long after your confinement?"

"Who told you this?" she demanded, even fiercely, seizing Lucas with sudden vehemence by the wrist.

"A strange character, this landlady of mine," mused Lucas, gently disengaging himself. "A mere guess, ma'am, founded on probabilities. So many children die nearly as soon as born."

"True," said she, with a sigh of relief, relapsing at once into her normal apathy. "I did not so understand you."

"This young—cousin of mine," he continued, poking the fire in a slow, absent manner, "may—hem—die early, as your child did."

"I never said my child died."

"Good heaven, ma'am, but you did."

"I said," she explained, in a dreary monotone, "that I lost my child."

"What is the difference?"

"Great!"

A light seemed to break in upon Lucas Raymond.

"Thank you, ma'am," he returned warmly. "I am exceedingly obliged to you."

Hannah regarded him with wondering eyes.

"Thank you again," he repeated, walking restlessly up and down the kitchen. "You do not know what a weight you have taken off my mind by your admirable—hem—suggestion!"

"I am glad you are pleased," said Hannah, dreamily; "but how I can have pleased you, I know not."

"Look'ee here, Mrs. Armitage," interposed Lucas, rubbing his hands, "thanks to you, I see daylight. I must go upstairs, and at once put pen to paper. My candlestick, good! and the lucifers; thank you! Meantime, make our little stranger as comfortable as may be for the night. Do you know," he concluded, with a pleasant change of manner, "I feel positive now that this child's friends will—hem!—come forward."

"I shall be sorry to lose it," said Hannah with true feminine inconsistency.

"That shall not I be," thought Lucas, already rising to go, and lighting his bedroom candle at the kitchen gas jet. "I am weary. I can hardly hold up my head.

You look also in dire need of rest, Mrs. Armitage."

"Oh, I never look any different to that," returned Hannah, composedly.

Then Lucas bade Hannah good night, and stepped slowly and musingly up the narrow staircase to his own bedroom. He walked to the window in a dreamy mood, flung up the sash, and gazed out upon the Jew's burial ground, which his window in Barossa Place commanded. The moon was shining very brightly on the graves, and Lucas felt soothed by the influence of the scene.

"Another grave," he murmured, with his head resting upon his folded arms, "is added to the tale of the Raymonds already underground. And here am I plotting and scheming my own advantage, just as those sleeping Hebrews below, maybe, have done before me. All to end in a little dust and eight parish deal boards. This child! this child! Whither shall I turn? What shall I do with it? Hannah's suggestion is perilously easy and simple. No criminality, only a little blame.

If the child is to be—removed, it had better be done *at once*. Or does looking on these heaps of clay and ashes make me forego my purpose; I may keep the child after all; I am weak as water to-night. A straw would turn me either way. Heaven knows how this will end! Meantime, rest!”

And Lucas shut the window and laid down. Soon tired-out nature asserted herself in spite of heavy anxieties and eating cares, and the money-lender’s clerk fell fast asleep.





CHAPTER XIII.

THE CHILD OF CHEYNE WALK.

ALONDON police-court slightly resembles a country dissenting chapel. The witness-box is like the pulpit. The boxes round will pass readily enough for the pews. Both places contain a certain amount of deal wood-work, stained drab-yellow. Both places are hideously devoid of any other internal decoration. The windows in both are nearer the roof than the eye-line. The long verticle rods for the gas-burners are identically disposed.

The sitting magistrate has already disposed of one case. His name is Mr. Pausey, and to his tribunal has come a

gentleman of Celtic origin, with a rabbit-skin cap, a long upper-lip, and flame-coloured hair, followed by a lady with her face tied up. She represented that her head was nearly pounded to a jelly, overnight by her lord and master. He explained that he happened to be in drink, and that she ought to know better, by this time, than to aggravate him when in that condition, as she certainly did. For, he confidentially informed the Bench, on such occasions of unbending himself, he was generally spiteful, and she knew it. He was prepared, however, to state in public that he was now quite ready, to overlook the fact of her having provoked him, and even to shake hands before the "Beak." He was sure he could say no fairer than that. Forgive and forget was his motto, and he did not bear any malice.

The magistrate allowed him to conclude his harangue, and then summarily gave him "three months," to his great dismay, with no option of a fine. Whereupon the gentleman with the fur cap somewhat changed his tactics, and dismissing his

assumed amiability, said mildly, that he would cut his wife's liver out when his time was up, and drive a nail in the worthy magistrate's coffin. So he was removed with some difficulty, chaunting a species of Celtic war-song.

The magistrate having made a note of the sentence, looked up from his desk.

"Don't call the next case on just yet," he said to the usher. "Where is Bradbeer?"

Thus appealed to, a police-officer stood forward. He was a heavy pompous fellow, with a moist uncertain eye, and whiskers like scrubbing-brushes. He used a sledge-hammer way of enunciating the dreariest common-places. He had a consequential roll in his voice, and his coat was buttoned up to strangulation point beneath his chin.

"Ah, Bradbeer," pursued Mr. Pausey, with a nod, "how about that Chelsea riverside business?"

"The body was found at Battersea, your worship," corrected Bradbeer, with an air that knowledge was power; "she did, to

be sure, jump in from Chelsea parish, but we goes by where they comes to land—”

“No, no,” interrupted his worship, petulantly, “I mean that stray child found in Cheyne Walk ; I forgot the place of finding for a moment, and you run off at score upon bodies.”

The policeman doggedly held his ground.

“It were a Chelsea child and a Chelsea body !” he murmured.

“When found ?” demanded the Bench, waving off his explanation.

“At 3 a.m., on Friday, March 20th, 1840, your worship,” rejoined Bradbeer, rolling out the concluding numeral with a pedantic relish of detail.

“Ay, ay,” said Mr. Pausey, snapping him up ; “and I remanded the case for a week to enable you to make enquiries, and I told you to advertise ; is that so ?”

“Your worship,” observed Bradbeer, sycophantically, “is as correct as your worship can be, which is saying a good deal !”

Mr. Pausey appeared propitiated by the

compliment, and begged Bradbeer to proceed.

"It were stated—" Bradbeer recommenced, who preferred to approach some subjects by a circuitous route.

"Never mind the purport," struck in the magistrate, with a jerk of the head. "Have those advertisements been answered? Yes or no?"

"Your worship," quavered Bradbeer, with deferential solemnity, "this child was lost on purpose. It never strayed at all—no, nor nothing like it. What do children want roaming out at three in the morning? Nothing, if they ain't put there!"

"Don't give me your views," said the magistrate, tartly, "but answer my question."

"It were stated," premised Bradbeer, a second time, trying to get himself under weigh, "to apply to the officer, who found the infant aforesaid on Cheyne Walk in March—"

"Have they so applied?" urged the Bench, with a yawn. "Come, man, we shall be all day."

"I have received no applications," answered the policeman, with a self-satisfied intonation upon the last word.

"Let the child stand forward," commanded the Bench.

"Please, your worship, it won't," murmured Bradbeer, sepulchrally, from the back of the court, where he was diving down in a species of wrestle with a recalcitrant little clothes-heap.

"Carry it forward then," suggested his worship, sharply.

A small and miserable bundle of dirt and rags was hoisted up into a sitting position on the ledge of the witness box, where the oath-book usually lay. The magistrate leant forward to bring this dismal object under his nearer inspection.

"Does any one claim this child?" demanded the magistrate, raising his voice for the benefit of, and in appeal to, about a dozen of the general public, who stood behind a railed-off enclosure, for the most part resting their chins on the spikes that kept them out.

Every one had grown abnormally quiet.

Folks were anxious at this juncture to avoid catching his worship's eye, lest, like an auctioneer, he should knock down the child to them with a sudden "Your lot, sir!"

Meeting no response the magistrate tries the bundle of rags itself.

"Where do you come from, my boy?" encouragingly spoken.

"Mummy," from the infant, or some sound thereto approaching.

"It looks like one," said the Bench, attempting a mild judicial joke.

Bradbeer in convulsions.

"It means its mother," suggested another officer more kindly.

Bradbeer recovering himself, proceeds :

"This prisoner—"

"What?" from his worship snubbingly.

"I mean this infant, can give no reasonable information whatever. I tried it with no effect within a few minutes of its first—apprehension."

"Let it be removed then to the work-house," decided the bench, entering a memorandum to that effect on the charge-sheet. "Call on the next case."

"Will your worship allow me?" from an energetic warm-looking gentleman, rising up like a Jack-in-the-box, from the body of the Court.

Permission accorded by the Bench.

"I am willing to adopt this child," said the gentleman, rubbing a rather bald head with a red silk handkerchief, in a manner suggestive of his having run all the way from Hyde Park Corner to Chelsea.

"Indeed!" from the magistrate incredulously, raising his eyebrows, "and pray, sir, what may be your name?"

"Barnet Padfield, at your service."

"Your profession, Mr. Padfield?"

"Well," hesitated the warm gentleman, "I am a kind of philanthropist and social politician. I am a vestryman in Brixton, and I hope to be some day in the council of the nation."

The policemen shook their heads at these announcements, and his worship seemed rather at fault.

"What do you mean by philanthropist?" said the magistrate, smartly.

"One who tries to benefit his fellow-

creatures," stammered the gentleman of the name of Padfield.

"Come, come," said the Bench, "this will never do."

The energetic personage suggested pertinaciously that it would do.

"I don't sit here to be contradicted," answered the Bench, in a fume. "I see as much human nature in this Court as any one man can see, and I surely ought to know. I say that this is not the way to set to work, or the right end to begin at, upon your fellow-creatures, as you call them. You will only lose your trouble, and get taken in for your pains."

Padfield, with the greatest submission to the Bench, begged to take another view.

"Why," reasoned the magistrate, frowning, "this lad is sure to run away from you when he is old enough. Nine out of ten of such vagrants will."

Padfield suggested that, even if the tithe lad only remained, he, Padfield, would have done something.

"You will have done something," reproved his worship, in a crushing manner ;

"you will have taught nine lads how to run away from you."

Applause from Bradbeer and various attendant satellites.

"I believe," continued the Bench, frowning down the philanthropist into subjection, "that you are not telling me a true story. What do you want this boy for?"

"Like enough," whispered Bradbeer in the magistrate's ear hoarsely; "he will bring it up to the rope-dancing, or the organ-grinding. I daresay this Padfield is one of their touts."

Padfield interposed that he was a person of means, and could give references. With regard to the wider question of philanthropy, he harmed no one by ventilating his hobby, and intended to persevere therein.

The Bench remarked *sotto voce*, that mules would be mules. Then Mr. Pausey suggested aloud, that he would see Mr. Padfield again when the court rose at four that afternoon. Meanwhile, let him leave his address, and enquiries on his position and means should be instituted. On this

Padfield bowed rather stiffly, and squeezed himself out of court.

The next case was then proceeded with. It related to a costermonger, unfortunate in having bad shillings continually in his possession. These the prisoner referred to a weird old man in gray hair and buff gaiters, who always bought his vegetables, but whose name and abode he had unluckily forgotten. Soon the attention of the public was wholly absorbed in this new direction. The lost child of Cheyne Walk was left to wail foodless till the court rose. At which hour its final destination between parish and philanthropy would be settled once for all.





CHAPTER XIV.

JULIA'S DECISION.

*A letter from Julia Bellamy, at Brighton,
to Mr. Julius Bellamy in Mincing Lane.*

"Marine Parade, June 20th.

"MY DEAREST FATHER,—

MY DEAREST FATHER,—
"Three months have now elapsed since the celebration of my most unfortunate marriage, and you suggested very wisely that I should take some such time for deliberation before I came to my final decision with regard to Christopher. I need hardly remind you that, for the first few weeks after the flight of my husband, I was too distracted with grief for any continuous

thought; and I shall always be most sincerely thankful that I had not to decide in the hurry and misery of that day, whether or not my husband's previous and unsuspected guilt absolved me from sharing his disgraceful exile. And though time and this beautiful sea have brought back to me my old and calmer self, still I could never find solution to my one perplexing doubt. Suppose this forger, this man steeped to the lips in falsehood, but, alas! this, my own undoubted husband, had raised his finger in some wicked foreign town, and beckoned me to come; could I, his wretched wife, neglect the summons, and sit still? To this hour, I am unable to decide, whether any amount of guilt can justify a wife in remaining apart from her husband, who commands and desires her presence. But in the whole catalogue of crimes, I can see that there is one, and, I believe, one only, that cancels all bonds of wifely obligation, and this is unfaithfulness to herself. Thanks therefore to the letter from Florence, in which we casually heard (from a source rather friendly to Christopher than other-

wise) how completely, how degradingly, he had forgotten his vows then only six weeks' old, I think I now can see my way with resolution, and even with resignation. The forger I would never have deserted, the traitor I both can and will abandon. Write, therefore, my dearest father, my final decision to Christopher at Florence. Tell him why and wherefore we can never be as husband and wife to each other. Explain to him that I might now have recourse to a common tribunal of divorce, did not my woman's nature shrink from branding my even titular husband, and your own brother's son with that epithet which his guilt has earned for him; did I not shudder at the thought of the dismal printed exposure of our family calamities, hawked about in every guilty alley, and commented upon in all the lazy, scurrilous clubs. No, rather let me sacrifice my life to perpetual loneliness. I will remain in the eyes of our friends as your unwedded daughter. The holy bond of child and mother will never be mine. Let me become, as the years flow on, an old maid, withered and peevish.

Let me settle down into little petty ways—be anxious about my cat, and exercise a lap-dog ; let these wretched apologies for that great human love, which I have played for and lost, be the object and concern of a frivolous existence. Let all this come upon me, not in a day, but, may be, in twenty years. Let me be changed so stealthily that I shall not even know that I am changed. The man whom I have dared to love is answerable for all this. It must be always so with women. Heaven help them all ! For when a girl has to choose, that choice must be made in the dark. Blind inclination, chance liking, casual acquaintance—these are the ingredients of a disinterested marriage compact. The man may be a fiend, for all she knows, or an angel, without her suspecting it. All men in love are so very much alike. Does one girl in a hundred understand her lover before marriage, as she understands her husband three years after it ? Is the mental picture of the man the same ? Hardly ever ; infinitely better, infinitely worse, and, I hope and believe, often infinitely better. Mine is

the other case. But, my dearest father, remember how very young I was—nay, I am ; though I have grown years older in experience during these three months of suffering. Remember, how closely I was thrown into the society of this man by the fact of our relationship. Remember last, that Christopher is no ordinary dissembler ; he is a sensuous, self-indulgent man, who acts for the moment. His momentary wish is his law and his god. The past is nothing, the future is nothing ; he is hungry, and he must eat ; cold, and he must be warm ; poor, and he must be rich. I believe that, when relieved of external pressure, this man's impulses are good. He is fond of children, enjoys a fine landscape, is passionately fond of music. His is a highly organised nature, craving enjoyment of every kind, with no vestige of self-denial. The result is inevitable. I need not prolong this dismal picture. I finish by sketching the man who has wronged me ; I began by asking you to convey to him my decision. I have now no more to add, but to remind you once more, before I conclude,

that I desire my final decision at once written to Florence. I think I should like to see what you write to Christopher before it goes ; there may be some little turn of sentence to soften and alter, which a woman's instinct may suggest. Any how, before it is finally sent, I shall add one line in my own hand and name, as a postscript, saying the rest is written at my desire, and that my resolution is unalterably taken. With best love, my dearest father,

“Believe me,

“Your affectionate daughter,

“JULIA BELLAMY.”





CHAPTER XV.

A GENERATION OF MEN.

THE foregoing letter concludes our prologue. The curtain descends upon our scene for two and twenty years. Time the consoler, Time the destroyer, lays a generation of men to their rest. The children who watched the door of the little City church when Julia Bellamy was a bride will have children of their own before we see Julia Bellamy again. Before then, Julius Bellamy's place in Mincing Lane will know him no more. He will sleep in a pleasant garden-grave near the great city of his toil, having been a just man according to his lights, and his loss will have touched his daughter greatly. Julia will have grown middle-aged without

becoming peevish and will wear lightly and cheerfully the reproach of her ostensibly single condition. Esdaile will return to his beeves and his green acres ; to his fair park and breadths of down and bracken.

But the man's love will not be forgotten as a dream of the night, and he will remain single, though not unhappy. Chivalrously constant to Julia, he refuses mentally to acknowledge her in the light of a married woman. At the same time, his delicacy teaches him, that in her present equivocal position, it would be ungenerous to press his visits upon her. So he stays away, and has never entered Arabian Crescent since. He bides his time, and hopes that events may dissipate somehow the clouds which surround their destinies.

Christopher Bellamy, the scamp, will not have put aside his scampishness. He will, during the interval, have drifted aimlessly and disreputably all over Europe. He is aged and his features have become puffy and sodden. He has had the small-pox in Austria and this has blurred the once sharp-cut outlines of his face. We shall

see him again in a beard. His hair will be tinged with frequent gray. His adventures have been numerous. He has been in collision with the police for one cause and another in Paris, Berlin, Rome, and Vienna. He has studied the slang, the wines, the cookery, and the gaming-tables of three or four European nations. He has sipped absinthe on the benches of a hundred wine-shops. He has consumed a shipload of tobacco leaves. His digestion is unimpaired, his discrimination of wine accurate and educated. He has broken at least one girl's heart in each of the capitals of four peoples. He is no whit the wiser for the warnings of twenty winters.

Basset Rutherford has prospered during the exile of his associate. His uncle's death has left him the leading partner in the Blackwater Bank. Of the mill he is now the sole proprietor. He has married a wife, who has brought some more money into the business; of whom presently. Beside the banking and spinning concerns, he is under his uncle's will a landed proprietor. The estate of Kidston Priory is

his, and he lives there in state and comfort. As he grows rich the thirst of accumulating more wealth still has come upon him and fired his dull boyish blood into energy, enterprise, and perseverance. He is now a man keen in pursuit of mammon, a man of many commercial schemes; and, oddly enough, he has developed into a personage of strong and pronounced religious views. The only drop of gall in the cup of his prosperity is that he is childless. His wife is Harriet Behrends!

When Lucas Raymond found the family inheritance, at least under his control, he asked Harriet again to marry him, her answer came to this:—

“Lucas, you have still not enough. Who could live on the interest of eight hundred pounds invested safely? and, if you trade with it, it may be lost.”

So, after that, Lucas asked her no more, removed his tent to Garwood, and commenced business on his own account in his native village. Hannah Armitage went with him to take care of his new home. We shall see them both again.

Reverting to Harriet Behrends, she remained at the "Crown and Sceptre," until one day the clerk, who succeeded Lucas, discovered old Samuel Michaelson dead of a fit in his office in Buckingham Street. The old usurer had made no will, and his sister, Harriet's invalid mother, received about ten thousand pounds under his intestacy. On the strength of this, Miss Behrends leaves her situation, carries her mother off to the Cheltenham waters, is announced among the fashionable arrivals, and continues to live there very genteelly with her parent, and to keep a boy in buttons to answer the door of their villa residence.

The waters, however, fail to improve the invalid, and Harriet mourns for her mother before she is out of black for her uncle. Then comes forward a sporting gentleman, who frequents the baths, by name Harker Bramley; he consoles and marries the orphan Harriet. One daughter is the result of this union.

Harriet, as Mrs. Bramley, often visits at Brendon, in Cropshire, which belongs to

Harker Bramley's nephew, then a minor, of whom he is a joint guardian with another relative. Now, Kidston is the next place to Brendon. When Harker Bramley died after seven years of matrimony, Harriet resided, during the first year of her widowhood, at Brendon; where Basset Rutherford, wooed and won her as a fascinating widow with ten thousand pounds of her own; which sum, in confidence be it spoken, gave the Blackwater firm of Rutherford and Rodney, bankers, a most seasonable lift just then.

Joseph Behrends continues to soak his brains in ardent drink and to practise his fingers, when sober, in the craft of a locksmith. His niece allows him a small pension.

Barnet Padfield has duly educated the child of Cheyne Walk, who has not run away. Barnet has named him Edgar Cheyne Lapworth. He is a young man now about to enter the medical profession.

The other personages of this drama, will, in person, report sufficiently their twenty two years' progress, when the curtain of

our narrative again rises upon them. New faces, young and old, will also appear and run their allotted hour of brief dramatic existence.





CHAPTER XVI.

A CLERICAL ERROR AND A MEDICAL STUDENT.

THE parlour of a London lodging-house suggests not unaptly that scriptural phrase—the abomination of desolation. The hovels of absolute and confessed penury have more atmosphere of a real home about them than those stern inanities known as “furnished apartments.” Surely, it is very dire to number for your household gods three spotted shells and one dirty piece of angular spar. There is no great comfort to be derived from a chain-like apparatus of flimsy green paper that festoons the looking-glass, or from the red frilled apron-like thing that masks your apology for a

grate. Still, these trials, though depressing, can be borne ; but the real tribulations of life are the anti-macassars. They exist in an abundance wholly disproportioned to the slender stock of furniture which they are destined to protect. They fasten upon your boot-buttons and trip you up. They adhere in ways strange and mysterious to the collar of your coat. You pack them up in your portmanteau, and exhume them from its innermost recesses miles away. They are all-pervasive, inevitable, scourges of the human race. The wise man can at best accept them with resignation.

In some such dismal environment, the sitting-room of an obscure London street, at present abide a girl and her male parent. He is middle-aged, she about nineteen. His name is Gerrard, hers Caroline' Rutherford. The untidy remains of a late breakfast occupy the parlour table. Gerrard Rutherford is attired in a silk flowered dressing-gown that has seen better days. His complexion is muddy and unwholesome, his eye dull and heavy. He has a large square double chin, and a protruding three-

cornered under-lip. In front his forehead is bald and polished. At the back his hair is grizzled, thick, and straggling. He peruses his newspaper through a double eyeglass. He is not short-sighted, but his eyes are very weak. He has a decided stoop in his neck, and round, ill-made shoulders.

Caroline Rutherford is to all intents and purposes a handsome girl. She is dark in complexion, and her hair is thick, blue-black, and wiry. Her nose is rather thin and aquiline. She resembles an Italian *Contadina*; and, with a folded head-handkerchief and a glazed pitcher, would do every credit to the character. But she is just six inches too short to be in proportion to the upper part of her figure; neither are Caroline's feet and ankles just her strongest point. Add to this, that her complexion is rather a dull, pasty yellow, than the healthy rose and white of an English country girl; and that Caroline requires a good deal of dress and a steady glare of candle-light, to appear to her best advantage. In the dubious light of a London morning, and her

present rather soiled print gown, Miss Caroline is probably looking her very worst. Her hair, though coarse, is extremely luxuriant, and she is wont to wear it in heavy, handsome coils. But, as few visitors are expected at this hour, her locks have not yet received their final elaboration for the day. In fact, they lie just now all roughened and jumbled in a net upon her shoulders, not unlike the mane of a well-bred cart-horse.

Such are Gerrard and Caroline Rutherford, who are concluding their breakfast—a pair not unconnected with county families, or unacquainted with financial embarrassments.

Miss Rutherford glanced at her father; he wiped his eyeglasses. Mr. Rutherford seldom began a conversation. Caroline dusted a crumb from the table-cloth. Her father scratched his nose. Who was to speak first? The maid-of-all-work, evidently; for she bounced into the apartment to announce that the laundress had called for her small account.

“Pa, dear, can you spare the money—

six and eight?" said Caroline, biting her lips.

"Washing, butter, and firewood," pondered Gerrard, with a hand on each knee, "firewood, washing, and butter! When you have paid for one, you have to pay for the other. That's the circle of existence. Let the woman wait."

"I am sure we send out little enough washing," complained Caroline, with a sigh. "Where is that portmonnaie of yours got to?"

A search of five minutes for the missing property, and a high rummage, conducted by Caroline and the general servant with much spirit.

Recovery and exhumation of the article mislaid from the interior of a partially expanded parasol.

"We are drifting, my dear," suggested Mr. Rutherford, mildly, "into very unsystematic habits."

"You grave Mr. Goose," retorted Caroline, playfully; "so you have only just discovered that?"

"I shall not fail to remember," laughed

the father, shaking his finger at her, "the way in which you have designated your respected parent—parson out of work, hack out of harness, and gentleman out at elbows."

"Three dreadfully bad trades," observed Miss Caroline, saucily. "Find the money, you dear old dawdler, do," she added, with a little gesture of impatience.

"I've only a sovereign and a threepenny-piece," grumbled Gerrard, hopelessly shaking out the purse, and turning it upside down. "What a remarkable thing it is, that I never do happen to have any change."

"Then Susan must try across at the 'Feathers,'" proposed Caroline, languidly stretching herself, and kicking off a trodden-down slipper in the process. "That laundress is a weary woman—heigho!"

"What," said Mr. Rutherford, with the air of a public examiner upon him, "is clear-starching?"

"I decline to answer!" exclaimed his daughter, with a yawn. "Why, you absent, wool-gathering, haziest of parents, do clear your head, and lend me a reasonable at-

tention ; for I've really something to ask you about, quite apart from bills and bothers."

Mr. Rutherford tilted his spectacles half way up his forehead, and laying his newspaper across the fire-screen, assumed an attitude of attention.

"I decided not to trouble you," pursued Caroline, pursing up her lips as though to reflect, "till you were fortified with some breakfast. For it is an irritable old bear at its very best, but before its food it is absolutely ferocious."

"I shall ignore the parenthesis," laughed her father, arranging his collar ; "proceed, miss, if you please, with your disclosure."

"I have heard from Kidston Manor by the early post."

"From those people?" demanded Gerard Rutherford, with a start, stiffening himself into a severely rigid position in his easy chair. "You don't mean that Basset Rutherford and his wife have asked a daughter of mine to Kidston?"

"Such an invitation has actually arrived," nodded Caroline, with an air of suppressed

triumph. "A joint letter from my uncle and aunt; who would have guessed it?"

"Confound them!" rejoined Mr. Rutherford, succinctly and benevolently; "though a clergyman, I can't help it; confound their impudence!"

"Papa, I'm ashamed of you!" expostulated his daughter, shrugging her shoulders.

"My company is obviously not requested, Caroline?" pursued the divine, abruptly fidgeting his hands about.

"Well—no—" came the daughter's reluctant admission.

"Then you shall not go! once for all!" frowned Gerrard, upsetting a tea-cup, and putting on an unrepentant face at the casualty.

"We will talk this over again," returned Caroline, with a careless toss of her head; "no reply need be forwarded for a few days."

"Was there any allusion," he asked, with folded arms, and a curl of the lip, "to my most insignificant self?"

"Aunt Rutherford supposes," pursued

Caroline, with a reference to the actual document, "that your health and habits of retirement would disincline you from undertaking so long a journey."

"She might have given me the chance," muttered Gerrard, between his teeth; "not that cart-ropes should ever drag me to Kidston. Still, such a sentence would read better in my refusal, than in my daughter's invitation. This fine lady brandishes my own dyspepsia in my face as an excuse for polite insult."

"Then I am not to go, father," she inferred, with evident disappointment in her way of saying it.

"Look you here, Caroline," he continued, with a heated face, and tracing an imaginary map of his own life upon the table-cloth. "My uncle was a spinner, and chose to die a squire. He spun all his life with such effect that he bought out the immemorial Kidstons, and laid his own plebeian bones in their family vault. He was childless, Basset and I were his two nephews. Basset entered the firm, I was sent to college, and intended for the church.

There was a comfortable piece of Simony in the form of a family living. Well, I took my degree easily, having a turn for classics, was duly ordained, but at my first curacy, at Penshingle, in Cornwall, I fell in with and married your poor mother. I disgraced the Rutherford caste by this misalliance; her father was something in the coastguard. We were sent to the right-about at once. My uncle scratched me out of his will. He bestowed the living upon an obsequious divine, who was kindly acting as my warming-pan. Basset, my affectionate brother, fell readily enough into the old man's views, and between them I was shouldered off into polite destitution. When my wife was just confined, I wrote under extreme necessity to Basset for ten pounds; he replied, that this was the very last occasion on which he was bound to render me any assistance. I wrote at length in despair to my uncle, who was ending his days with three footmen in powder, for a five-pound note. He sent me ten shillings in a post office order. I never applied again to either relative after

these rebuffs. No penny of theirs has ever since entered my exchequer."

"Don't fret yourself now with recalling old wrongs," persuaded Caroline, with a soothing gesture. "Tell me about your early married days at Penshingle. When you were a real actual duty-taking clergyman."

"I was always nervous," allowed Rutherford, crossing his legs; "I was not fit for much duty even at my best. I had a nightmare of breaking down. Imagine my terror at a christening, conceive my fright at a wedding. Well, I never married but one couple, and I shall not easily forget either that or them. I suppose a lawyer remembers his first client."

"What a pity!" exclaimed Caroline shaking her skirt out, "that I was not grown up! I would have kept you, sir, to the mark of your clerical duties. You would have dreaded me, I promise you, more than your congregation!"

"That was not the worst," pursued her father, wiping his spectacles. "The reading shattered me, but the district-visiting

annihilated me. The wives hated me because I could not prescribe for their babies in colic, teething, weaning, and croup. The husbands made nothing of me because I didn't know an oak from an elm tree; my rector hated me because I could not ride to hounds; his wife hated me because I was married. In fine, I gave up my curacy, migrated to town, and tried to live by my pen. Nothing would prosper. Your poor mother sickened and died, and still came neither help nor recognition from Kidston. Rumours reached me, meantime, of the regal state in which everything was done there. Well, in process of time, the old cotton-spinning spider dies, and my cub of a brother inherits the footmen, powder, and paraphernalia of squirearchy. Already bloated with wealth, Basset must needs marry an heiress. Here his luck breaks down. Money will not bring children, and he is stricken with the curse of being childless. That is about the only thorn in the downy pillow of Dives. Realize, my dear Caroline, the terrible result. Here is a county family—actually

a generation and a-half old—about to be extinguished ! So dire a calamity to the plutocracy must be averted at any price. My brother's narrow pride metes out the human race into Rutherfords and not Rutherfords, or better into Rutherfords and barbarians. I sent an attorney once, in my worst straits, to read my uncle's will at Doctor's Commons. He told me that I was carefully excluded from ever receiving a penny under it, but that my children might get something some day. I mean to go and read this will again now, but I am lazy and dilatory, and I expect very little to come of it. Anyhow, you are next in the line after this amiable couple, and you are a real Rutherford, though a girl only. For with them a female Rutherford outweighs a male anyone else. As my daughter, Caroline, you answer this description. They have graciously resolved to patronize you. Go, if you please, fetch and carry for them."

And Mr. Rutherford sank back, wrapt his dressing-gown round his legs, and resumed his newspaper.

Caroline laid a remonstrative hand on the arm of the flowered dressing-gown.

"Do be calm, a moment, you rough old darling!" she pursued, in a silvery whisper. "Suppose the visible head of our clan and the squiress regnant do not approve of me, I can but come back again. I own I should be glad to get away from these suburban borders for a few weeks, and that I should especially hail an opportunity of retreat hence just now."

"I can't," sneered Gerrard, looking over his paper, "venture to put the sparrows of Grape Cottage, Cherry Terrace, Holloway, into competition with the Kidston fallow-deer."

"Don't be spiteful, sir," she exclaimed in a tone of mock anger; "this irritable ogre forces all her little secrets from his reluctant daughter. If you must know, Mr. Tetchy, I would gladly be at a distance from Edgar Lapworth, just at the present juncture, there!"

Mr. Rutherford put his head on one side to consider.

"Does this invitation, my dear, alter the

question of Mr. Lapworth?" he hazarded, slyly.

"I hardly know," she hurriedly returned, her cheek tinged with some touch of confusion.

"Lapworth," said Gerrard, in a tone of allowance, "is certainly devoted to you, and not entirely without merit. Still, I fancy somehow, you might do a little better."

"Hardly in Cherry Terrace," she rejoined demurely, plaiting her handkerchief over her forefinger.

"Then you shall go, Caroline," conceded Mr. Rutherford, appeased, sitting forward, with a hand on each knee; "I will pocket my pride, and send you to Kidston. You want change, and I can't afford to give it you otherwise. Perhaps you may get on with these people; I never could."

"That's my indulgent old man," thanked Caroline, patting her father's head. "I'm a frank daughter surely, and I have no reticences. If you and I had lived in a palace, I suppose I should be more re-

served. A room nine foot square, and a defensive alliance for the suppression of weekly bills, have made us a rather matter-of-fact, work-a-day couple."

"In fine, my dear," smiled Mr. Rutherford, with a sad humoristic irony in the observation, "our mutual difficulties with the buttermen have taught us to take common council against Cupid."

"So that is decided," nodded Caroline, with lightened brow; "still there is one difficulty in this expedition which is not likely to occur to the male mind—clothes to go in!"

"Well remembered," pondered Mr. Rutherford, wrinkling his forehead in deliberative perplexity, "can nothing be done by those recondite processes of picking to-pieces and joining together backwards, in which you are so great an adept?"

"You silly old dear," corrected his daughter, coaxingly, "I can certainly manage something in that way. Still one or two good and really new things are indispensable."

"Cannot these be furnished on credit?"

hazarded Mr. Rutherford, hopelessly, nursing his knee.

"I fear not," hesitated Caroline, glancing down disconsolate; "you see, I must go to a court dressmaker this time, else I should reach Kidston like a scarecrow."

"I give it up," exclaimed her parent, shaking his head.

"Don't talk like the injured guesser of a conundrum, try again, sir!" flashed out Caroline, with a spice of petulance.

"Lord bless me," protested Gerrard, flaring up in his turn into emphasis, "where am I to turn? Whoever possessed superfluous cash in the tenth week of the quarter? We have hitherto in all our difficulties respected the family watch, the silver teapot, and your maternal grandfather's presentation telescope."

"Now, do not fuss yourself, papa dear!" she expostulated, giving him a gentle push of encouragement, "I shall scheme it out some way; of this much I am confident. Let me run and get dressed now, to go out and market for our dinner. Isn't it glad to be rid of a tiresome girl and

to get back to its eternal prosy newspaper?"

"It is not glad to be pinched," said Mr. Rutherford, rubbing his arm with a semi-rueful face, after his daughter had bent down to give him a valedictory kiss.

"Ah," mused Caroline, already at the door, "if I only had a bracelet and a sealskin, I might go visiting *then*. What is a girl, after all, without her sealskin?"

"What is the matter now?" enquired her father, pausing in the middle of a paragraph. Caroline returned from the door and laid her hand fondly on her father's shoulder.

"Shall it be confided in, or doesn't it deserve it?" she enquired with downcast eyelids.

"Do we resume the subject of Lapworth?" asked Gerrard, rubbing his chin, and trying to keep his place with his left forefinger.

"Doesn't it begin to notice wonderfully, as the nurses say?" whispered his daughter, with a musical laugh.

"Well, miss?" he awaited, laying aside his journal in despair.

"Well, ogre," she went on, with a twinkle of amusement in her eyes; "you know the man, who is a stump, with a crystalized ship and a live green-finch?"

"By the dead wall, yes," nodded her father readily; "I remember the crippled mendicant well."

"Having accomplished my back hair and emerged, it is more than likely I may find Edgar Lapworth in a hovering condition, within range of this public celebrity. Come now, advise me, you dear, stupid parent, shall I give Edgar his final dismissal?"

Mr. Rutherford could not for the moment devise any appropriate reply. So he drummed on the table, and leant his weight on one prong of a breakfast fork.

"Have you any decided feeling, my child," he stammered, "one way or the other?"

"Nothing to signify," returned the oracular Caroline, with a shrug of her fair shoulders; "Mr. Lapworth's chief merit,

to be candid, resides mainly in the fact, that he is the only lover I have got, or until this invitation, who seemed ever likely to appear on my horizon of sentiment."

"There is something in that," agreed Gerrard, swaying his head; "yet somehow Mr. Lapworth—is not quite—"

"Is not quite a gentleman," conceded she, concluding the sentence for him, with a laugh; "perfectly right, old dad, but are we, after all, quite gentlefolks? Well, this Rutherford patronage may end in smoke."

"You are a deuced sensible girl," said her parent emphatically.

"Or, again," she argued, changing colour, "I may actually take root among the upper classes, marry well, pension my old father, and supply him with innumerable newspapers and capacious arm-chairs, and deliver him evermore from bondage to book-sellers and editors."

"And abolish laundresses and butter-men," added Gerrard, brightening up.

"Therefore," concluded Caroline, raising her finger, "I shall neither, for the present,

dismiss or accept Edgar. Of course, I have refused him a dozen times, but then there are refusals and refusals. Meantime, I shall have seen some good society, and know my own mind better, after this visit to Kidston."

"You have chosen your course with infinite discretion," applauded Mr. Rutherford, reaching down for his newspaper. "You are a girl, by Jove, for any parent to be proud of!"

"Then I'm off to market," exclaimed the young lady, bustling away in heightened spirits and headlong vivacity. "Our proposed dinner is, one pound of chops, two vegetable-marrows, and a sago-pudding. Will that do, child of luxury? Edgar shall carry home the chops. They wrap them up so badly. My young man is of no great use, but this much he can do. How shocked they would be at Kidston Manor to hear me rattle on in this vein! Bye, bye, you gray moth in spectacles!"

And Miss Rutherford tripped gracefully from the apartment, having imprinted a

hurried kiss upon the region of her parent's eye-glasses.

Caroline's surmise, that Mr. Edgar Lapworth might be waiting in that direction of proximity, which is described as round the corner, proved on due examination to be substantially correct.

Edgar had, during the last forty minutes, patrolled a furlong of dead wall in the immediate vicinity of Cherry Terrace. In regularity of lounge and watchfulness of gaze, his recent manoeuvres might be regarded as really creditable specimens of amateur police duty.

Mr. Edgar Lapworth himself now demands a few lines of comment.

His status in society is told easily enough. He is at the present a budding student of anatomy, whom his friends, and especially his guardian, Mr. Padfield, confidently expect to be on the verge of developing himself into the more expanded blossom of a bachelor of medicine. But tribulations of an examinational character must intervene before this desired consummation; and at seasons, Edgar himself

doubts whether the attractions of Caroline Rutherford, regarded as so many hours substracted from his preparative course of studies, may not ultimately imperil his chances of satisfying that grim Board of examiners, who haunt even now his nightly visions.

But when, having stated Mr. Lapworth's prospects, we arrive at his character and appearance, the difficulty of our task begins to deepen upon us.

Edgar Lapworth is a young man about whom it was easy to deny much, but difficult indeed to affirm anything. He was not short, he was not tall; he was not good-looking, he was not bad-looking; his hair was not dark, but no one would call it light. Nobody called him a good fellow, and none considered him a bad one. His attire was certainly not neat, but justice demands that it should not be described as slovenly. One of the few decided statements we can make about Mr. Edgar is, that he was very undecided in himself; a person perplexed with infinite doubts, and a human illustration of that me-

chanical law, whereby two equal forces acting simultaneously in contrary directions cancel each other. Add to this, that he was self-conscious and seldom at his ease, and conclude this catalogue of conflicting negatives by the compendious statement, that Mr. Edgar Lapworth was a neutral young man, and seemed to be himself harassed and overwhelmed by the realization of his own neutrality. Therefore his views were never strong, and easily modified. His eyes were gray; his trowsers were nearly always so. His complexion, on foggy mornings wore an undecidedly ashy tint; widely divergent opinions were held on the subject of his age; to some folks he seemed twenty, to others twice that number of years. Mr. Edgar Lapworth was really twenty-four.

In due time, Miss Rutherford came trippingly along; she bore a lady's travelling-bag in which to store and secrete her more manageable household purchases. Once inside, a mutton-chop travelled as genteelly in the lady's hand, as a port-monnaie or a smelling-bottle.

"Oh, Mr. Lapworth, is that you?" she smiled, in tremulous hesitation, "you seemed to rise suddenly out of the pavement."

"I'm sure it's very stupid of me to have startled you, Miss Rutherford," he murmured, raising his hat; "but I ventured to say that I should wait for you here this morning."

"Did you?" she mused, glancing at him with half-raised eyes; "well, perhaps you did. But I am sure it is very silly of you to have done so."

"It is very natural, Miss Rutherford."

"Such a waste of time also, with your examination so near."

"I read very hard all night."

"The surest way to confuse yourself, Mr. Lapworth."

"Must I go away, then?"

"You deserve to be sent away."

"But I may come for this once?"

"For this single once," she relented, gathering up her shawl, "and then only, because I've something really serious to tell you; and this may be my only oppor-

tunity of speaking to you for some time, and the thing is not worth writing——”

“You are never going to leave Holloway?” he threw in, hurriedly.

“Yes, Mr. Lapworth,” continued Miss Rutherford, in a tone of demure indifference, “we must say good-bye for some weeks. I leave town about Wednesday on a visit to my uncle at—hem—Kidston Manor, in Cropshire.”

“Kidston Manor!” echoed Lapworth, completely quenched by the mention of the family seat. “I suppose it is a very fine place,—dear me!”

“My aunt naturally sees a good deal of society,” pursued Caroline, in a matter-of-fact voice; “the house will probably be very full of visitors.”

“You will forget us all in Holloway,” hazarded Edgar, with much feebleness of tone and slackness of statement.

“I really know so few people in Holloway to forget,” she replied, with a curl of her lip, persistently ignoring his drift.

“One insignificant person will miss you

there," he stammered, behind his raised hand.

"Now, Mr. Lapworth, once for all, if you begin to be sentimental I shall request you to go home," said the young lady, coming to a resolute and abrupt pause.

"I won't offend again," he interposed, hurriedly, "indeed, the words slipped out quite unintentionally—Ha!—Mr. Rutherford accompanies you?"

"N-no," she explained, with a tinge of confusion. "My father and uncle don't get on. I should not reside in this Holloway place if they did," with a disdainful emphasis upon the suburb.

"I suppose you couldn't, I don't mean exactly write, but give me one line, now and then?" surmised Lapworth, in hopeless desperation.

"What do you mean by not exactly writing?" demanded Caroline, mercilessly.

"It doesn't signify," repudiated Lapworth, gloomily, "I knew it was out of the question. Oh dear, yes! Please don't give it a thought further. Ha—much shooting at Kidston, Miss Rutherford?"

"Pretty well, I fancy," said Miss Caroline, appeased. "Are you fond of the sport?"

"I have not shot much lately."

They walked on for some moments side by side in silence.

"Mr. Lapworth," she began, with a sudden blush deepening upon her face, "I have something to say to you."

"So I feared," he admitted, ruefully, "so, indeed, I apprehended."

"In fact," she recommenced, faltering, "I believe—I confess—I do think that you might at least help me to begin."

The hesitation of her exordium changed, in conclusion, to a pretty girlish petulance. The unreasoning, summer-lightning anger of a woman, vexed at her own perplexity, and seeking to throw the onus of her mental complication upon the nearest person at hand.

"You see, Miss Rutherford," he returned, meekly, "having no idea of the probable direction of your remarks, except that they are to be in some measure disparaging to myself and detrimental to my—my—well

—aspirations ; I cannot be expected, you know——”

And Mr. Lapworth paused irresolutely on the threshold of a hopeless grammatical complication.

“ I don’t wish to say anything painful,” pursued Miss Rutherford, incisively, “ to—hem—anybody. But as you will not help one to speak, and choose to ignore my meaning, don’t blame *me*.”

“ But Caroline—Miss Rutherford——” he expostulated, reddening.

“ Please allow me to go on,” she insisted, waving him off. “ Now, if I had a mother she would say all this for me, but, as I have none, I must say these things myself. My father is buried in his books and would not understand such matters. Well, I am not giddy or impressionable, thank heaven——”

“ Quite the reverse,” thought Lapworth, gloomily ; “ and so much the worse for me.”

“ Would you mind keeping up a little more ?” hinted Caroline, with some asperity, “ if you will be half a yard behind, I must

raise my voice till the whole street hears us."

Edgar came abreast of his fair companion much chastened by this reproof.

"Dear me," considered Miss Rutherford, buttoning one of her gloves, "how difficult it is to begin! Well, then, I am free to confess, indeed I do not wish to appear unconscious—"

"It's very handsome indeed of you to say so," murmured Lapworth, with a gulp and a shiver.

"That, on certain occasions, you have made use of various expressions to myself—"

"Don't, Caroline, please, allude to them."

"Which expressions, or compliments, or whatever you like to call them, might lead me to suppose that you professed towards me, what shall we say? A respect verging on attachment."

"Oh, Caroline," groaned her suitor, with a despairing series of sighs, "how can you cool down all the seething torrents of my devotion into such lukewarm conventionalities?"

"Seething fiddlesticks!" replied the young lady, tartly. "Now do be reasonable, Mr. Lapworth, and let me conclude, for mercy's sake. Well, as you have spoken in this sense to me—which, by the way, you never ought to have done—I suppose I am bound to give you some reply."

"Now, please don't, Caroline," he entreated, rubbing his hands nervously; "I require no kind of answer—that was the last thing in my thoughts. I know that I am not worth a reply. If you only let me come out walking with you now and then, after you come back, I shall do capitally, and I promise never to breathe a word about attachment, if this displeases and annoys you."

"But I wish to come to a definite understanding," she persisted, biting her lips and slackening her pace.

"Do not come to anything so incomparably cruel!" exclaimed Lapworth, with much fervour, and a blank stare of desolation.

"I will be candid with you, Mr. Lapworth," said Miss Caroline, arranging her

bonnet-strings ; " you have many excellent qualities, and are calculated to inspire considerable reciprocity of sentiment in many other—quarters."

She hesitated over her choice of the last word, and ultimately found and enunciated it with an air of placid toleration.

" Other quarters," rejoined Edgar, in hurried gloom, and with some vagueness, " are to me no consideration whatever. If—other quarters—came to me upon their bended knees,—I don't mean exactly that ; but I am unalterably yours, or no one's. That's plain English, Caroline !"

" And a serious piece of impertinence," she frowned, with some difficulty repressing her amusement.

" You drove me to it, Miss Rutherford," he expostulated, extending his hands outwards.

" Then, you won't let me end this most silly business before I go to Kidston ?" resumed Caroline, calling up a severe look.

" By no means," protested Edgar, with unusual decision. " Suspense is better than dismissal."

"Don't say, for goodness sake," corrected Miss Rutherford, with somewhat feminine casuistry, "that *I* am keeping you in suspense; or that, in so far as I am concerned, there is any, what you please to call, suspense about the [matter. For, if I am sure of one thing, I am sure of this—that you have had your answer scores and scores of times; and what can a girl do more? Suspense, indeed!"

"I crave pardon," cried Edgar, piteously, "and amend my remark. Let me say, Caroline, that toleration on any terms is better than dismissal."

"Say what you choose," said Miss Rutherford snappishly, tossing her head; "I am sure it does not matter to me what you say."

"It concerns me much, what you choose to listen to," he suggested, with a feeble attempt at smartness.

"I have no time," she interposed, hurriedly, "this morning for taking such fine distinctions, and here, besides—that's a more practical consideration—is my butcher's shop."

"I'll gladly wait, you know, outside, Caroline."

"No, Mr. Lapworth," said she, emphatically; "I cannot allow you to direct general attention to my movements by any such absurd proceedings."

"I can look as if I didn't belong to you, indeed I can."

"Indeed you can't," denied Caroline, with considerable truth.

Lapworth still lingered reluctantly.

"You must positively leave me," she repeated, with a gesture of impatience; "Good-bye, Mr. Lapworth."

"May I write to you at Kidston, Caroline?"

"I don't know."

"Will you answer my letters, Caroline?"

"Certainly not!"





CHAPTER XVII.

“SUMMONED.”

THAT same evening, Edgar Lapworth had agreed to meet Philip Raymond, his friend and associate, at the “Turk’s Head,” a dingy City chop-house, where these young men habitually dined. Philip Raymond was in the law, and the “Turk’s Head” was very convenient for legal customers.

The day had turned out a day of farewells to Edgar Lapworth. He had taken his leave of Miss Rutherford, under circumstances the reverse of encouraging to his tender hopes in that quarter; and now he must part with his friend Philip. In fact, the dinner at the “Turk’s Head” that even-

ing was a valedictory banquet to Philip Raymond.

The two young men occupied the smoky little box nearest the fire-place. They had purposely dined rather early to have the room more to themselves.

"William," said Philip, raising his voice in appeal to the waiter, "we want a real bottle of wine to-night. Our last merry meeting is worthy of something more than your normal chemical combinations. Meantime, clear the table and poke the fire."

William whipped off the cloth, and disappeared, like a pantomime imp, through a trap-door in the flooring of the "Turk's Head," whence he emerged in due time, sneezing, with the required vintage. He then produced glasses from an old-fashioned corner cupboard ; and finally retired into a kind of magnified pigeon-hole, where he was wont to drowse when not on actual duty.

"So you are really off to-morrow to the pastures of Cropshire," began Lapworth, with a sigh. "Well, I wish I was going with you."

"By the way," said his friend, slyly, "you met Miss Caroline to-day; can you report any progress in that direction?"

"She is an unsatisfactory girl," complained Lapworth, ruffling up his hair; "how she does waste my time, and ruffle my temper, while I go hanging on after her all the same! I shall never pass at this rate. My medical career is likely to be ruined; my excellent guardian, Padfield, is sure to be furious. I shall be writing 'Caroline' across the examination-papers."

"My dear fellow," said Philip, sympathetically, without meaning to be harsh, "does she care one fraction about you?"

"I can't make her out," mused Lapworth, cracking a walnut; "yet I believe there is hope, as long as a girl thinks it worth her while to tease you."

"She ought to say definitely 'yes,' or conclusively 'no,'" argued Philip, holding his wine to the light.

"She has said 'no' right enough," assented Lapworth, scratching his eyebrow; "it is only fair to give her credit for that."

"And meets you, notwithstanding?"

"Well, I ought to say I meet her, perhaps."

"I wish I could persuade you," said Philip, with sudden seriousness, "that she will never suit you."

"It is somewhat of a coincidence," added Lapworth, holding his head sideways, "that she also goes to some Cropshire relatives to-morrow. They call their place Kidston."

"Heyday!" exclaimed Philip, "to be sure. Rutherford, of Kidston, bankers and mill-owners—very great people, indeed—within easy reach of Garwood. I have heard my mother mention them right enough."

"I can only repeat," said Lapworth, with dismal persistence, "that I wish the more I was going with you."

"So these are Miss Caroline's relations," cried his friend, with a sibilation of surprise; "to be frank with you, Edgar, I rate your chances with this girl lower than ever I did, now."

"I know my birth goes against me," confessed Lapworth, with an uneasy glance at his friend; "no girl would like to be re-

mind that her husband was picked up upon Cheyne Walk."

"If she is worth anything," consoled Philip, with cheerful assurance; "she will judge you in yourself."

"Did ever a maiden—out of a romance—do that?" sighed Edgar.

"Cynical!"

"My dear Philip," rejoined Lapworth, with desolation in his accents; "I am bothered off the face of the earth between love and examination, between Cupid and Æsculapius!"

"You will settle down," said Philip yawning, "to your books and experiments, when your charmer is consigned to the seclusion of Cropshire. Courage, old boy, you will pass, thanks to her absence."

"If you should hear about her at Garwood," suggested Lapworth shyly, playing with the nut-crackers, "you might send me a line. Any trifle, you know, would be acceptable."

"I will not fail you," agreed his friend; "still, if I read rightly this uncle of mine, I shall not have much time for lounging

about the neighbourhood, or for collecting scraps of gossip from the great folks' tables."

"And how do you read this uncle of yours, who has summoned you?" next enquired Lapworth, suddenly looking up, where he sat with his elbows on the table, and his face buried in his hands.

"Read his letter and judge for yourself," returned Philip, producing an envelope and tossing it across the biscuits.

"Hem," began Lapworth, clearing his throat, "finds his business increase and himself none the younger, wants a clerk, and recalls the existence of a nephew, signs himself 'Lucas Raymond,' and—that's about all. Not a very cordial document!"

"Nor a cordial man at the end of the pen that wrote it."

"And what says your mother, Philip, to this migration northwards?"

"She is refreshingly sanguine," laughed Philip, "bless her old heart! I am to become a partner in the present, and a millionaire in the future. She has visions

of county families calling upon her in glass coaches."

"Good luck to you both," said Edgar, reaching his hand out; "fresh air and increased halfpence are certainly not to be sneered at. I shall miss you, old fellow, I shall certainly miss you!"

"To our next merry meeting!" proposed Philip, raising his glass.

"Philip," resumed Lapworth, picking despondently at his bread-crumbs; "I wonder if your turn will ever come?"

"You mean whether I shall invent a Caroline on my own account?"

"Ah! who knows? Perhaps at Garwood," said Edgar, with a rather sickly smile.

"At the milk-pail," laughed Philip civilly, "or among the nightingales. Or at the cart-tail among the hay-cocks. Let this last drain of the 'Turk's Head' vintage flow in her imaginary honour."

"Scoffer, beware!" said Edgar, raising his finger.

"Forlorn one, cheer up," rejoined Philip, giving his friend a push.

"I intend to," insisted Edgar ; but his looks did not bear out his resolve.

"Pluck up your spirits," encouraged Philip, slapping his friend's shoulder. "Think no more of this seductive maiden of Grape Cottage, Holloway. With this word I leave you, for we must really part. We have taken sweet council and fresh chops together ; but the inevitable hour has arrived. We have discussed my legal prospects and your romantic embarrassments. Farewell, old friend, stick to your books, and chase all visions of this Siren from your thoughts, and you will be M.D. and I half way to the bench when next we dine at the 'Turk's Head.'"





CHAPTER. XVIII.

LUCAS RAYMOND'S OFFICE.

THIS is the village of Garwood ; and this is the office of Lucas Raymond, attorney in general to this same village, and land-agent in particular to Squire Esdaile, who owns a portion of Garwood the aforesaid, and is now closeted with his man of business.

Both gentlemen are seated before a ponderous open volume. On one page, various fields and lanes and wastes are mapped in various colours ; opposite, their descriptions, occupants, rents, measurements, and so forth, are duly set forth in well rounded manuscript characters.

The squire, the lawyer, and the lawyer's house, each deserve a word of comment.

Here is Harvey Esdaile after the twenty-two years' interval in our acquaintance with him. The squire is still tall and slim, sandy-grizzled haired, and forty-three. A notably good-looking man, with a straight nose, bushy light eyebrows, thin lips, and a firm clear-cut chin. Still remains the sleepy, rather dull expression over those handsome features. Still the clear blue honest eyes are rather vapid and dreamy. One curious fact about the squire, after the interval, was, that he never walked even the shortest distances. He rode about his kitchen-gardens, he rode about his home-farm. When he entered a cottage, when he was, as now, at his lawyer's; when he called on the parson, when he inspected the village school, on each occasion his stout cob always stood waiting outside; and served to the village in general as an outward and apparent symbol of the squire's presence within. Consequently, when some lesser notable of Garwood found this erratic cob tethered on any threshold, to which he was

bound on business or pleasure, as neither were generally or often urgent in Garwood, the neighbour would incontinently retire till the cob had passed on elsewhere. We have heard that Turkish noblemen deposit in their ante-room a pair of slippers ; that in old days plague-infected houses were signed with the red cross ; either illustration may help us somewhat, though not exactly, to understand the significance of the squire's cob appearing before any dwelling-house in Garwood.

Lucas Raymond we find, after the same interval, grown into a massive thick-set figure, with a large bald bullet-shaped head, intense black eyes, deep-set like an eagle's are, a well defined but rather over-developed chin, and a broad heavy jowl.

He was rather inclined to obesity, and his complexion bore the pale and puffy aspect, that tells of much sedentary occupation. He was quite clean-shaved and dressed in black. Lucas Raymond's office stood in Garwood High Street, a capacious garden lay at the back of the house, but the front elevation stood flush with the other edifices

of the village. A gaunt brick wall enclosed the three retired sides of the garden, to the rear.

Lucas Raymond's house itself was a curious rambling edifice, dating from the reign of Charles the Second. It had come, whether by gift or purchase, to be the vicarage of Garwood. It was rumoured that this vicarage house had risen on the site and ruins of some earlier conventual edifice in connection with, or an offset from, the greater Priory up at the Hall. Anyhow, the actual building now occupied by Lucas, could not antedate Queen Anne's reign. The late vicar had most conscientiously fulfilled the Adamite command to increase and multiply, and the capacity of the dwelling had suited his overflowing family well enough. He had even appended some ungainly additions to the west side of the block, which he had named, naturally enough, the nurseries, and the name still clung to this side of the building.

In due course, this vicar slept with his forerunners in Garwood Church chancel,

and the small vicarial fry were distributed over much of the habitable globe; in Jamaica plantations, China tea-houses, Indian Hill stations, and the like; where they thrived or came to grief after their kind and inclinations. But when the new vicar appeared in a shrunk little childless valetudinarian, the roominess of his official dwelling became a care and a reproof to him.

He lived a few years in the smallest corner of the ground-floor, like a shy and sensitive spider, who feels himself wholly unequal to the task of extending his webs over a labyrinth of dusty ceilings; and is much oppressed by a sense of insufficiency to fulfil his ideal of araneous obligation. Poor little man, the damps of the old house settled on his chest, and its dust off the spacious floors floated up into his throat; and he fell into a very depressed and nervous state. For several crones of the village took care to supply him with full particulars of various well accredited apparitions of monks, supposed to be his fellow inmates at the vicarage.

So the small vicar got himself ordered change of air, and departed for a month, and had now been absent some twenty years. He lived in a breezy cockney little watering place in the south, in a tiny four-roomed cottage ; which would have stood easily, chimney-stack included, in the large vicarage dining-room, with its gigantic chimney-piece, and a flue like a section of the metropolitan railway.

Thence he was only heard of at Garwood as appointing at intervals its curates, or replacing them. For their generations were many as the leaves, and their scrapes as frequent as the clouds ; and, except in their general incompetency, it was difficult to say that they left any mark upon the parish. The present *locum tenens*, however, had just arrived, by name, the Rev. Paul Wing ; externally, at least, he seemed to promise better things, for he was as spruce as a peacock. But of him presently. It only remains to say, that the vicar having vanished, the vicarage refused to let.

No one in Garwood wanted so large or

so incommodious a residence. At length, Lucas Raymond, who was just then beginning business as the local attorney, bid about half the rent originally demanded, and the absent vicar closed cheerfully with him. The envious said, that the large house was worth the rent twice over to Raymond in the increased respectability it gave his business.

Raymond, we are inclined to think, knew well what he was about in taking the vicarage, though he did not deem it necessary to enunciate his reasons from the house-tops of Garwood High Street.

We have kept the squire and Lucas Raymond waiting an unconscionable time before the estate book of Garwood Priory.

"You perceive, Raymond," began the squire, drawing a heavy forefinger down the corner of the plan, "that these twelve acres of Vidler's, who is always, by the way, in arrear, are quite detached as regards the bulk of my estate. Here that pompous money-grubbing fellow Rutherford completely circles me round, and to the south that infernal Garwood common-

land assiduously blocks me out. Then your late slip runs in. That I shall keep. But the schoolboys must overrun me on this side."

"You can't preserve on such land as this," assented Raymond, biting his pen.

"Not even a tomtit's nest," agreed the squire, with a heated face. "These boys will climb anything. You never did me a better turn, Raymond, than when you disposed of your family land on the other side, to me."

"I was a poor man, squire," said Raymond, "and the price was naturally a great temptation. I sold thankfully enough."

"You took the land from your brother, eh?" demanded Esdaile, carelessly, still poring over the plan.

"I inherited it through him, you mean, squire," corrected Raymond, with a shade of asperity in his tone.

"Well, it's all the same," said Esdaile, with a glance of surprise at the attorney.

"By no means, squire; all the difference in life," insisted the man of law, bridling up considerably.

"Well, let that pass," pursued Esdaile. "Rutherford wants this land of Vidler's, and I've half a mind to let him have it. He hands me over eighteen hundred pounds, and I give him a receipt for the money. He doesn't want to cheat me, and I don't want to cheat him. The thing would be done in five minutes, but the law steps in and says no; 'Pardon me, gentlemen-vendors, I must have my pickings, or I'll ruin your title for all time.'"

"You speak as a layman, squire," muttered Raymond, drumming on the table with a paper knife. "You must describe what you sell, and shew you have a right to sell it."

"There!" exclaimed the squire, "I knew he was going to cut in with his legal difficulties. Look'ee, here, Raymond, there's no entail on Garwood. I might sell the lump of it to-morrow in open market, like a sack of beans. Who could say me nay to that? He who can sell the

whole can surely sell a part, if there's any truth in Euclid."

"My dear sir," reasoned Raymond, with pertinacious emphasis, "I must explain at some length; the lay mind is always prone to rush upon such conclusions. Rutherford's lawyer, suppose this sale proceeds, will come to-morrow, the next day, a month hence, and ask me one or two most pertinent questions, which, if I cannot answer on your behalf in the negative, he will return to Rutherford with the assurance, that his employer might as well invest these certain hundreds on an old tin kettle as on these acres of Vidler's."

"Let us hear," interposed Esdaile, with a shrug, "what Rutherford's lawyer is to ask, and, for mercy's sake, translate it into plain language, Raymond! For, if it's anything about, whether I've been suffering from a recovery, or the like, you may as well speak it to the stone-crusader in Garwood Church."

"To speak plain, squire," proceeded Raymond, "I may speak bluntly. Blame

your own injunctions, if I do. Rutherford's man will say, 'Give me proof that Mr. Esdaile has not pledged Vidler's farm for a loan of money, just as a poor man pledges his watch. Give me assurance, that no wife of Mr. Esdaile's has or can claim any jointure on Vidler's land ; that no widow of any previous Mr. Esdaile can do so ; that no daughter, brother, sister of his own, has his or her fortune secured upon it ; that no annuitant exists with a prejudicial claim against these acres. That Vidler himself has not got a lease. Even if he hasn't, on what conditions Vidler holds. But I weary you, my good sir ?' said Lucas, abruptly concluding his recital.

"Well, settle it your own way," conceded the squire, drumming his walking-stick on the floor. "Trust a lawyer or a woman to get the last word."

"I wish that I could see," retorted the lawyer, good-humouredly, "a Mrs. Harvey Esdaile to get the last word at Garwood."

"I'm past that now," smiled the squire, not displeased.

"You should consider posterity, my good sir," said his legal adviser, nibbling a pen.

"Practise what you preach, Raymond, then I'll listen to you," rejoined the squire, arranging his collar.

"You have a duty to perform, squire ; I've only my personal comfort to consider," said the lawyer, marking emphasis with an office ruler.

"I tell you what, Raymond," exclaimed the squire, in a bantering tone of mock-earnestness ; "will you break the news to my sister-in-law, Mrs. Wilfred Esdaile, if I ever do commit myself ?"

"Heaven forbid, squire," cried Lucas, in dismay ; "anything to oblige you except that. Mrs. Wilfred is formidable, and if you will excuse me, squire, the remark—Mrs. Wilfred is a lady, who likes to know the ins and outs of everything within her reach. I am a very poor match for her, lawyer as I profess myself."

"It almost makes me laugh to tell you," said the squire, with a mock-serious glance at the attorney, "that you have raised Mrs. Wilfred's curiosity greatly on one detail.

What do you suppose she asked me the other day?"

Lucas passed it off with a laugh, but he did not seem wholly to relish what was coming.

"This," pursued the squire, with a ringing peal of laughter, "Why you had Raymond and Raymond on your door-plate? 'Who is the other Raymond?' cries she, 'that's what I want to know.' Bless the woman, I had been in and out of this place for years, and never had once thought about it."

Lucas looked extremely disconcerted and not a little annoyed. He began to explain at once with a flurried cough:

"When I first moved down here from London, a relative advanced me some of the funds necessary to start myself in business; therefore I then considered that kinsman (as he was), an actual, though a sleeping partner in the concern."

"My dear fellow," interposed the squire, heartily, "I don't ask you to explain. Let my sister-in-law cudgel her brains, it will amuse her."

"I prefer to conclude," insisted Lucas, losing his constraint as he went on. "Well, this kinsman is—removed, dies in fact. But I never thought it worth while to get a new door-plate. Besides, many folks prefer dealing with a firm to having relations with an individual."

"My niece," remarked the squire, with a twinkle in his eyes, "greatly disconcerted her mother, by gravely suggesting that you had taken the ghost into partnership; the whole village, you know, believes in the vicarage ghost."

"Well, it never troubles me, squire," answered Lucas, with affected gaiety, but evidently again not quite at his ease.

"Lord bless me!" cried the squire, producing his watch, "how I do waste time in chattering. It's one o'clock already. I say, Raymond, can you see my pony where you sit?"

"All right, squire; he has not broken from his moorings," was the reply.

"Then I'am off," said Esdaile, drawing his gloves on. "You will do what is usual about Vidler's land, and report further."

"One moment, squire," interposed Lucas, ringing the bell, "my door-latch is rather puzzling. Let me summon my housekeeper to let you out."

"She has been with you a long while," remarked the squire, jerking his head towards the door by which the housekeeper would enter.

"Ay, ay," returned Lucas, in a tone of allowance, "she suits me well enough. She falls in with my ways. She wants no change; and I detest variety. We both exist by clock-work, and thrive upon it somehow. She is getting slower at her work though, or she would have been here by this."

Hannah Armitage appeared at the door. She was still a beautiful sad-looking woman. Twenty-two years had hardly touched her features, but her hair was tinged with gray.

"Hannah, show the squire out."

"Thanks, Mrs. Armitage. A late spring this."

"The springs are grown later, Mr. Esdaile, since we were young folks."

"By heaven, you are right there!" sighed the squire, with a twist of his shoulders; "they hardly warm one's bones now."

The squire mounted, and rode slowly away.

"Ah," mused Hannah, glancing after him, "he is easy and rich and kindly, but he has just one little wound in his heart that makes his riches dust and ashes."

"Hannah," called Lucas from his office, in a tone of some irritation.

Hannah closed the door slowly after her wont, and again went to her master.

"You kept the squire waiting, Hannah."

"I was upstairs, sir, at the far end," she replied submissively; "it is some way to come down."

"Ah, true, exactly," said Lucas, rubbing his knees. "By the way, I may as well hand you these new shillings now," and he produced a small silver-paper bundle from his writing-desk.

"Yes, sir, it will save trouble," she agreed passively.

"There they are, fresh from the die,"

he added, turning the coins over one by one.

"How long will these last you—above stairs?"

"A matter of three months," she hazarded, wiping her face with her apron. "I feel the fire now, master."

"Good, then remind me in due time."

At this juncture, the door bell rang.

"I expect arrivals, Hannah," said Lucas, referring to his watch; "and they are punctual. Stand here beside me at the window, note them well, and tell me who they are. Can you put a name to these people?"

"It must be your brother Matthew's son," hazarded the housekeeper, without moving a muscle of her face.

"What makes you say so?"

"The likeness, master—the likeness!"

"You might have guessed worse, Hannah."

"Good Lord!" she ejaculated, in a kind of stony surprise; "Mr. Matthew's boy! ah! my word, and a clever lad, too, I will warrant him."

"We shall see; show them in," spoke her master, musing, as if his thoughts were miles away.

Hannah returned with Philip Raymond and an elderly lady.

Mrs. Matthew Raymond had been pretty in her youth, and wore ringlets yet, upon the strength of bygone fascination. She still forced her fingers into the tightest of kid gloves, because she had once been credited with finely-moulded hands. But, except the gloves and ringlets, her general appearance was mouldy and widow-like. In countenance and in manner, she reminded one of a pertinacious London sparrow.

Lucas advanced a few steps to meet them as they entered the apartment. Hannah lingered about the door-way, and watched the meeting with such curiosity as her impassive temperament was capable of.

"Kinswoman, you are welcome; nephew, you are punctual," spoke Lucas, extending to each, in succession, a hand, which had a cold, limp feel about it.

"We have obeyed your summons, uncle,

most thankfully," returned Philip, with cheerful and cordial deference.

Then succeeded a pause, during which Lucas took ocular stock of both mother and son in silence; and, pending which operation, Philip became extremely nervous that the pause should somehow terminate.

"We left our luggage at the station," said Philip, rushing at any remark in desperation, and lighting upon one extremely common-place.

"We were conducted here," explained Mrs. Raymond, undulating forward with a rustle of silk, "by a boy from an adjacent—hem—coal-wharf. I did *not* like his sudden way of whistling, nor the defiant manner in which he nearly pulled your dear uncle's door-bell out of its—ha—socket; though, I presume, he acted in this manner to express willingness, and to increase his rate of remuneration."

Lucas leisurely concluded his survey, and, with equal deliberation, commenced—

"First, you are here. Good, so far. Next, nephew, you have brought me a reference, I conclude, from your last employer?"

"Which, of course, my dear brother-in-law," murmured Mrs. Raymond, interposing with a simper, "you only required as a matter of form ; and, indeed, so I told my boy at once. For who, after a week's acquaintance with Philip, much less one, who had stood in the relation of an uncle towards him ; ever since he was a playing boy at his poor aunt's that's gone,—would dream of taking references, considering the character he bears for steadiness beyond his years and equals ?"

Lucas turned round abruptly, and regarded the voluble old lady for a few seconds in speechless amazement.

"Perhaps, ma'am," he suggested, in rather freezing politeness, "you might take a chair for the present."

"Mother," whispered Philip, endeavouring to draw her aside, "it is only right I should bring some account of myself."

"It is best," pursued his uncle, dealing out his words one by one, "that we should begin by understanding each other clearly. I shall not import into the present transaction any melodrama about relationship,

or any common-places about attachment. You owe this much to the accident of your being my nephew, and no more, that I cast about for a clerk, and your name suggests itself."

"It is only right to say," muttered the irrepressible widow, now addressing the office-table with plaintive and querulous persistence, "that many would jump at Philip for a clerk, who had nephews of their own positively starving for the situation. And even had that dear boy of Mrs. George's lived, which it is more the pity that he followed her to his last home so shortly; and I shall never forget the turn it gave me among the foreigners, when your good uncle wrote to say poor dear Gilboa had departed; and well I am sure your uncle buried her, considering that a sixpence was then a sixpence to him; though now, I am sure, with such a house and business, it must be far otherwise. And though I have not seen your uncle since, yet I must conclude the dear child was taken, else where should he be now? and I see no signs of him upon the premises,

But I do not think the boy would ever, if spared, have grown up into a clerk, at least by no means equal to my own, though I, a mother, say it that should not."

"My good madam," insisted Lucas, in a kind of stony resignation, "might I recommend you to peruse to-day's newspaper?"

For all his outward impassiveness, the widow's rambling diatribe had touched a chord which made his eye flash fire.

"I find," resumed Lucas, scratching his chin, "that I am growing old, and my business is growing heavier——"

"I am sure," nodded Mrs. Raymond to her son, in a stage whisper, "that I never saw any gentleman carry his years so lightly as your dear uncle does."

"I am therefore compelled," continued Lucas, with a shrug of impatience, "to secure the assistance of a clerk. I cudgel my brains for any likely person to engage. I remember that my younger brother has left a son, who is living."

"I should think so!" disdainfully exclaimed his sister-in-law, whose maternal instincts were keenly roused by so meagre

a statement of this fact; "living! that indeed! and as fine an upstanding young man as you care to see. With all his limbs and senses right, and a fine close head of hair; and steady beyond all belief, when young men usually will be such rackets."

"Do be quiet, mother," remonstrated Philip, with a furtive attempt to pacify her.

"I am endeavouring to explain," proceeded Lucas, sternly waving his sister-in-law aside, "that, other qualifications equal, my brother's son might, on some grounds, suit me better than a stranger. But a diligent stranger would suit me better than a lazy relative."

"Very handsomely said," chimed in the widow, in a tone of patronage.

"And why?" resumed Lucas, tartly; "I should have more hold upon a kinsman, and it would sound respectable, and bear out my door-plate, to have two Raymonds in the business."

"This is a thing," soliloquized Mrs. Raymond, with upturned eyes, "to be remembered to one's dying day with gratitude."

"Madam," said Lucas, at length out of patience, turning round suddenly upon the undulating and palpitating widow, "your son has had the good sense not to interrupt me, until he has heard some fragment of what I have to say. Might I suggest that I shall lose my day, and your son his situation, unless you allow us to understand each other."

"Mr. Raymond," replied his sister-in-law, majestically nervous, "my feelings are harassed, and I cannot be expected to be either business-like or silent."

"Suppose, mother," suggested Philip, touching her sleeve, in a whisper of remonstrance, "you took a turn or two about the High Street."

"There is one subject," persisted Mrs. Raymond, beginning to dry her eyes, "to which I must allude, though some may wish to see me dumb. Are those railway people to be trusted all this time with our boxes? Who knows? It stands to reason, that a company's servants can have nothing near the characters of domestic ones; and not a thing was safe with our Maria Jane,

though a private family at Brixton spoke of her most highly."

"I am convinced, mother," expostulated Philip, in a tone of real annoyance, "that our effects are perfectly secure. Indeed," he added, "they are not of sufficient value to repay a plunderer."

"One never knows, my dear," reasoned Mrs. Raymond, unconvinced, and blandly shaking out her ringlets; "though, by constitution, I am far from timid."

"Good heaven! ma'am," sneered Lucas, with an emphatic suddenness that made the widow jump, "your trunks won't run away."

"And then again," persisted she, slightly bridling up, and with faint irony, "it might be a comfort to learn, where it is intended that my son and myself should reside."

"Where you're to lodge, eh?" demanded Lucas, with abrupt curtness.

"I said reside," corrected Mrs. Raymond, mildly, yet with genteel firmness.

"That is a mere detail," rejoined Lucas, gruffly enough, "which can be easily arranged hereafter."

“ I should hardly have expected,” observed Mrs. Raymond, with another application of her handkerchief, “ that the fact of a widow lady being totally unable to furnish any residential address whatever could be spoken of as a ‘ mere detail.’ It being the law of England that even the lowest should give one, as the postal orders show. Now, to say, ‘ Cloak-room, Garwood Station,’ would only sound suspicious, for who ever lived at a cloak-room ? And this may be untrue, besides, if swindlers have made away with our effects. Since those porters will give up anything to anyone who claims it with a bold and brazen face. And it is not so much the silver spoons and *papier-maché* inkstand that I regret, for these the company shall make good to me. But one’s late husband in a fancy frame must be nearly irreplaceable. Suppose, indeed, they broke him up when the police pursued them, knowing well both Philip and I could swear to him with ease ; but the stockings and linen one might be mistaken in, especially if they picked the marks out.”

"Zounds, madam," cried the lawyer, in high irritation, "I tell you your goods are as safe in our station-master's custody as in the bullion-cellar of the Bank of England. Regarding your next anxiety, half our High Street shops let lodgings. I can recommend you to a dozen. Only do permit your son and myself to arrange preliminaries."

"I have not been accustomed," interposed Mrs. Raymond, loftily, "to reside under, or rather over, such—circumstances. It is true," she added, with a burst of candour, "that there was one chandler's shop in Chichester Terrace, but the landlord never meant it to turn out one, till his brother talked him round; and put in half the fittings at his own expense; and long he rued it, as the terrace rents fell off sadly afterwards."

"Live where you please, ma'am," said Lucas, with some asperity. "Only, for the next few minutes leave us in peace."

"Suppose," began Mrs. Raymond, glancing around her with a sense of happy suggestion in her manner, "that, as your

uncle has so much spare room, he should set part of your salary against our rent, and always find you handy even after office hours, if anyone went to law unexpectedly ; as they will sometimes do, and no one to be found to write it down, if the clerk is out on pleasure. Let alone the solitude to your uncle of seeing nobody but clients, which must be far from wholesome, and calculated to affect the nerves."

"Once for all, Mrs. Raymond," answered Lucas, brusquely, and with decision, "it suits neither my habits nor my plans to accommodate you here. This is no mere question of room. I have lived in my clock-work ways, and cannot have you coming in on me like an earthquake. Hannah would never tolerate another servant. In fact, there are twenty reasons, special and good, why even the thought of such an arrangement cannot be, for an instant, entertained."

"Then," said Mr. Raymond, rising to retire with an austere smile and the expression of a martyr, "I will, with your permission, step back to the station, and

just cast an eye over our packages. No doubt it may be all right as your uncle says so. Still, meaning no wrong, some trunks might go back to town as passengers' luggage this afternoon. For when a porter sees a box at a station lying helpless, he naturally thinks it has to go somewhere."

And Mrs. Raymond departed, much to the relief of Lucas, and to the no great discomfort of her son.

"Now, nephew."

"Yes, uncle."

"My terms are these, Average hours, nine to four: busy days more, slack ones less. Salary, one hundred a year, paid monthly. Instructions, never to gossip in the town about anything which you may learn as my clerk. Simply to know as much about any case which comes in here as I choose you. Last to learn, that my own private affairs concern you nothing. When I am at home you will occupy that outer room to do your work in; when I am out you can sit in here for a change. The rest of the house and my private rooms I can see no necessity for your entering. Neither will I have you

lounging about the garden. No smoking, mind, anywhere. Will these stipulations suit? Take ten minutes to reflect, while I go on with this lease."

Silence succeeded, only broken by the scraping of Lucas's pen. Philip spent the interval in contemplating the moulding on the high old-fashioned office chimney-piece. Drowsy as he was with his long journey its tracery began to assume a fantastic likeness to the harsh profile of his uncle's face, as it bent with knitted eyebrows over the folio sheets of crabbed legal manuscript. He started from his mixture of sleep and reverie, when his uncle at length looked up from his writing with the laconic enquiry :—

"Well, nephew, your decision?"

"I am content, uncle," he rejoined, gratefully, "to become your clerk upon your own terms. They are all reasonable, though some seem to me unnecessary."

"Then that is arranged," returned Lucas, in a tone of relief. "My hand upon the bargain. Let me see now. Take you two days' furlough to get lodgings and unpack.

Begin here, say, Wednesday. Take possession of your desk on that morning."

"I will be punctual, uncle," responded Philip, promptly.

"Meantime," pursued his uncle, bending down again to his writing, "your mother will, probably, ere now have involved herself in some bother with the station people."

"I will step up there," said Philip, seizing his hat, "and rescue her forthwith. As to lodgings, uncle, you said you kindly could direct us."

"Try," returned Lucas, after a moment's deliberation, "Duffin, Eavestaff, Barley ; all respectable High Street names. Mention, that Lucas Raymond sent you ; and, I fancy, they will all scramble for your patronage."





CHAPTER XIX.

STARCH AND MONEY-BAGS.

IDSTON MANOR, the country seat of Basset Rutherford, J.P. and D.L., for the county of Cropshire, was in excellent repair. Not a paling was missing in the park fence. The cover-hedges were trimmed to a nicety. Not a brick was loose in the wall of the pleasure-ground. The mansion itself, red, raw, and newly pointed, looked like a gigantic baby-house. It was solid and massive, hopelessly ugly without, and extremely comfortable inside. Not a slate was missing, not a pipe was wrong, not a cistern was leaky. The furniture was of two dates. First, much, new, expensive,

and gorgeous upholstery of the date of Basset's marriage ; secondly, a good many old things, spared because they were as good as the day on which they had been purchased by Basset's uncle. The apartments contained none of the cheaper make-shifts of less opulent establishments. The very coal-scuttles had cost as much as a city clerk's best carpet. And one leg of the drawing-room table contained as much work as the side-board of the clerk aforesaid. The new novels upon that table bore no badge of Mr. Mudie's.

Expense is clearly no great consideration in a household, where, instead of being hired, the ephemeral literature of the day is purchased out and out. Such a proceeding would surely connote the possession of considerable wealth. Then the servants at the manor were the domestics of opulence. There were gentlemen in mourning, of noiseless tread, and perfect manner ; and there were gentlemen out of mourning, in uniform and silk stockings, who moulded themselves on their sable-suited superiors. None of your gaunt

boys—as the manner of country service is—rough and rubicund, fresh from the plough-tail, or redolent of the stables. Louts who managed to bring their clumsy toes into contact with the legs of the furniture. Clowns who smashed freely every week almost their own weight in earthenware. In brief, the whole establishment reeked of opulence. And now we come to the master, whom any beggar would pick out of a crowd as a “warm” man,—a man with whom “both ends” of annual expenditure not merely met, but considerably overlapped.

Basset Rutherford was in right of his tenure and ownership of Kidston Manor enrolled in the rank of the Cropshire squires, although by profession and occupation he concomitantly continued a banker, a mill-owner, a speculator, a director of railways. It is true, that he was not regarded in the county as a squire of the very purest water. The taint of commerce must always cloud the pure crystal of squire-dom to a certain extent.

Esdaile of Garwood was a squire, as a

squire should be, the ideal of the type. His race had been on the land for centuries, he himself had no occupation whatever, he moved rarely beyond his own estates. Perfect squiredom viewed the outer world with suspicion, held idleness the true gentility, estimated a man by his ancestral tree. Still the Rutherfords now held in the second generation an estate conferring squiredom, and a squire Basset became, though he only just scraped through into the charmed circle of the territorial paradise.

Twenty-two years had altered Basset though they had by no means improved him. He still could look no one straight in the face, when he addressed them. He had grown bald and wore stiff "mutton-chop" whiskers. Time had thickened both these and his eyebrows, though it had thinned the rest of his hair. He was now a tall shambling man with his head bent forward, and a knobby Roman nose too large for his face, which, when assisted by the effect of each bushy whisker, looked truly aggravating. His two upper front teeth were usually

visible outside resting upon his nether lip, which trait was also rather annoying. His voice was sonorous, and his manner pompous in the extreme. His bald forehead shone to such an extent, that one might half believe he had it polished every morning with his boots.

To his credit we must confess, that Basset Rutherford had become a man of indomitable energy and perseverance in his commercial pursuits. He was sanguine, too, like his quondam associate, Bellamy. Most rather unscrupulous men are so. He had neither Christopher's readiness nor assurance. Indeed, he was as slow and ponderous of thought, as he was of manner and movement. But he had thrice the backbone and staying power of Bellamy. Christopher's energy needed excitement, was spasmodic, intermittent ; Basset always worked at high pressure and never flagged. Speaking generally, Christopher was clever and versatile, Basset dull and unimaginative. The chances of the two friends had been about even at their start in life. Now, after twenty-two years, Christopher

reappears as a vagabond, Basset as a capitalist.

Start any two men, equal in life. Let their respective characters and capacities be such as Bellamy's and Rutherford's. Take stock of their relative progress after a quarter of a century, and there is not much doubt which will have won the race.

One point more of contrast with Bellamy, and we have done. Basset was a hypocrite, a cant, from some innate need in his nature of hypocrisy and canting. Now Christopher was only a hypocrite when he had some end to gain. In fact, his usual and natural attitude was that of revolt against the proprieties of life, whether social or religious. But Rutherford, an eminently "practical" man, had certainly a soft place in whatever portion of his brain this organ of religious showing-off was situated. He became as he grew older, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, sanctimonious, a formularist, a stickler for outward observances. He revelled in all this for itself, for it brought little solid result and certainly dipped into his pockets; and drew away his time from the great,

and except this, sole passion of the man's life—money-making.

Watch him now bending over his writing-table at the Manor. At the Priory Squire Esdaile will not be risen for an hour. But here is Rutherford with a dozen letters already written at his elbow. Note his table, littered with every species of business communication, prospectuses of companies, maps of projected lines, the *Miner's Circular*, the last number of the *Economist*, attorney powers for the sale of stock, docketted letters in droves, counsel's opinions on blue paper, telegrams on orange paper, several huge envelopes stamped with "official paid" and no Queen's heads, cheques, bills, banking-books, papers covered with figures, several samples of cotton by pattern post, tickets to charity dinners, begging applications *ad infinitum*. Esdaile has three letters this morning, a circular about petty sessions, a farmer's application for a new gate, and a bill for a dozen of sherry.

At last, Basset Rutherford pauses, and rubs his right hand, for it is cramped with

much writing. He walks to the fire-place and renews the coal, and stands with his back to the chimney-piece, sucking the feathery end of his pen.

“Family prayer bell in twenty minutes,” he meditates, chafing his cramped fingers. “Is it worth while to begin the bank balance-sheet? No, I shall lose the thread of my calculation in the middle. Better despatch a few formal answers to letters received. Best of all, perhaps, rest, my brain is weary even at these early hours. My business is growing too large; I am not equal to coping alone with all the ramifications of my schemes. These many commercial irons in the fire at one time would wear out a man of adamant. I hold all the threads, pull every string, flash off my *ultimatum* to New York, my decision to Calcutta; all rests on my sole shoulders. Suppose I broke down. If I can only bear the strain for a few years longer, I shall be a Rothschild, and dwarf many a puny English duke with my gigantic fortune. I shall rest then from my labours, perhaps go into Parliament; begin public

life as an independent member ; watch the oscillations of party government ; strike in at a pinch in favour of the side whose balance seems likely to prevail ; put down a good lump sum on the eve of a general election ; get myself a peerage in return ; put up the new arms over the portico here ; and have myself painted full-length in my robes ;—meantime work, grind, drudge. Ah, Harriet, is that you ?”

Since we met Harriet Behrends in the Oxford Street tavern, she has not greatly changed. The same black beady eyes just a little dimmed by time, the same raven ringlets, with a few gray hairs coming upon their gloss. Her character has modified with her altered position. In old days thrown upon her own resources, with a sick mother on her back, Harriet had been self-reliant, not of temperament, but of necessity. Now in prosperity, with everything done for her, she had become an essentially reflective woman.

Persistent, managing, a schemer within certain limits, with a will to dominate,—being all this in herself—she drifted after

a few years of her second marriage into a mere feminine echo of her husband. She was haughty because he was pompous. Haughtiness is the feminine correlative to pomposity, an essentially male attribute. No one ever saw a pompous woman yet. She got to view the religious world through his mental spectacles. As he defined his attitude towards society, so she defined her relations towards the Cropshire lady neighbours. She was, in short, rather a vacuous, receptive woman, and drew in her whole mental atmosphere from anyone whom she happened to be continually with. She derived the colour no less than the consistency of her impressions from external personal influences.

Harker Bramley, her first husband, was a sporting, hunting, racing-man. During his life, Harriet's talk was of field-sports, the "Quorn," Ruff's Guide, and Newmarket. With Bramley's decease her interest in these topics wholly faded and flagged. Her interest now was quite as sincere in the stock-exchange, the share-market, and the "spring meetings," *not* at

Newmarket, but at Exeter Hall. Such a woman makes by no means a bad kind of wife. Mrs. Rutherford's strong point was her adaptiveness, which, like a soft voice, is an excellent thing in a woman.

Now, the wooing of the banker had come to pass in this fashion. Some ten years ago Basset wanted ten thousand pounds. His actual capital was all out in investments, from which he would have to withdraw it at a heavy loss. Full of this need, he visited at Brendon, and finding there Mrs. Bramley recently widowed with about that fortune, he, there and then, offered to make her Mrs. Rutherford. It is true he had met her often previously at Brendon, during her nephew-in-law, Gilbert Bramley's minority. It was stipulated in the marriage contract, that a sufficiently wide range of investment should be allowed the trustees of her fortune, on Harriet's second marriage, to admit of that fortune's prompt investment in the banking concern of the firm of Rutherford and Rodney at Blackwater.

And as this bank was a going, reputable,

and thriving concern, the lady's friends made no difficulty whatever about this arrangement. Harriet received as equivalent a certain interest in the profits of the house. Basset really, in his inmost soul, respected his wife more, as representing ten thousand pounds in the bank, than he would have done a portionless woman, however excellent. One reason why this couple got on excellently well, was, that the husband readily allowed, that a woman with ten thousand of her own had a full right to make her voice heard on human affairs in general, and those of Kidston Manor in particular.

So Harriet entered her husband's study a little before prayer-time, and he said to her at once :

" I want your serious advice, Harriet."

" About things at Blackwater, Basset ?"

" No," pursued the banker, picking an oblong document out of his heap of correspondence ; " this is Mr. Oldsquare's opinion on my uncle's will."

" Nothing wrong, I hope," said the wife, with a quick glance at the banker.

"As far as I am concerned, nothing," explained Basset, biting musingly his pen. "The doubt came to the surface thus. Blackwater is just thinking of building villas on the outskirts of Kidston land. I have no power to grant building leases, so it turns out. I send up my uncle's will to counsel to solve one difficulty, instead of doing so, counsel suggests another."

"These tiresome lawyers," lamented Harriet, with a gesture of impatience.

"My respected uncle," drawled the banker, in a consequential voice, "by whose will, under Providence, I came into possession of Kidston, was,—I regret to disparage the departed,—in one matter of no slight moment, penny wise and pound foolish!"

"Indeed! what error was this, Basset?"

"He made his own will," told her husband, rubbing his knees fretfully, "he might as well have tried to make his own clothes, or to drive a velocipede, or walk on the tight rope, or play the violin, all and each of them, at the first attempt.

There! It puts me out of patience even to think about it."

"His motive being?" interposed his wife, nervously.

"A paltry economy," grumbled Basset, looking up abruptly. "Mark the result. No one can lay a brick on Kidston ground. Bad enough that; worse remains. It is a moot point, it seems,—a thing resting on the turn in the air of a half-penny,—whether, after all, this place is not entailed after my death upon my niece Caroline Rutherford!"

"What a dreadful discovery!" exclaimed Mrs. Rutherford, drawing her breath short; "but you mean after her father, my dear,"

"Nothing of the sort," said the banker, between his teeth; "this much is clear, that my brother Gerrard is excluded by name; and it is by this exclusion that the confusion arises; for the testator, after cutting him out, proceeds to explain in a muddled kind of way, that though he hates Gerrard, he does not mind Gerrard's children coming in, provided I have none,

which, my dear, after ten years of matrimony is a likely event—at our ages.”

“Go on, Basset,” said his wife, with a look of real distress.

“Well,” pursued the banker, beating the table with a tag of red tape ; “in trying to make this clear, the testator has accidentally used technical words which probably give Gerrard’s children an estate in tail after me. Now, what is to be done ?”

“Make it up with your brother,” hazarded Harriet, raising her eyebrows.

“No, my dear,” detailed the banker, raising his finger to explain ; “ask my niece here upon a visit, and do not extend the invitation to my brother.”

“That is certainly the preferable course,” nodded his wife, with a face of deep attention.

“Thus we shall see,” said the banker in his slow secret way, “whether this girl is worthy to come after us. Suppose she is, the will may rest as it is. And we will endeavour to get her married to a religious reputable man. Suppose we don’t like her, we must then take the highest legal advice

upon this will, and endeavour to evade or upset it. How say you, Harriet?"

"That I cordially concur," answered his wife with a lightened brow; "Caroline Rutherford's invitation shall be written and despatched this very morning."

"It is needless, my dear," returned the banker, ruffling his hair; "I directed my secretary at the bank to write to my niece some days back. You were out on a visit at the time, and the matter has slipped my memory until this morning. But the policy of this invitation was so evident, that I knew you would concur."

"Your secretary will have written in my name?" she hazarded a little petulantly, but putting a good face on the matter.

"I really forget," reflected her husband carelessly, "but I suppose so; invitations hence are generally worded as coming from the lady of the house, or from us both jointly. It is the usage of society."

"Has your niece answered?" she demanded, looking at her nails.

"I expect her reply daily," threw in the banker with a yawn; "it will take her a

week or so, I suspect, to conquer her pig-headed parent, if she wishes to come."

Which she would ; of this his wife felt convinced beyond all manner of question.

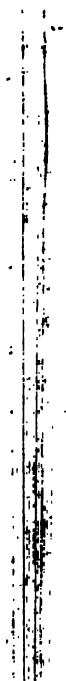
"If she does, it will do nicely," concluded the banker, and he resumed his writing, while his wife stood watching him silently.

"This niece," thought Mrs. Rutherford from her post of observation, "shall come by the day mail next Monday, and I will make some excuse of my horses being lame, to induce my nephew, Gilbert Bramley, to meet her, half accidentally, at Garwood station, and drive her in his phaeton over here. It will be a pleasant, an almost romantic way, of throwing these young people together ; and, if Caroline Rutherford is to have Kidston, I could not choose her a husband more to my mind than my late husband's nephew ; come, Basset," she added aloud, "there goes the prayer bell, I hope you have remembered to find your places."

"Prayers are ready, ma'am," said a solemn personage in black who entered at

this juncture. This announcement was not verbally an accurate one, but he did not well know what else to say, for clearly the formula "prayers are on the table" would have been even more objectionable.

END OF VOL. I.





1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles, including "The Hon. Mr. Justice" and "The Hon. Mr. Justice".



